Juvenescence

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Juvenescence

by WhyDoesEverythingHappenSoMuch

Summary

In which Will, young FBI trainee, is on a field trip of sorts to kick off his forensic science unit. Will expects to sit quietly, take notes, and avoid eye contact, the professor has different ideas.

A few days later and Will can't seem to stop bumping into the acclaimed writer, surgeon, and dinner party host Hannibal Lecter

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"Are you sitting or not?"

"I have yet to be invited," The man knelt in one graceful movement and plucked the pen off the tiled floor. He held it out to Will between two fingers like a cigarette, "Have I paid my dues?"

Will gave a terse nod and snatched the pen back. He set back to work revising his notes from the previous week's classes. A week his professor had been talking up this little field- trip-like excursion, and yet so far, it had only managed to rattle him and throw him into the path of frankly annoying strangers.

Notes

See the end of the work for notes

Chapter 1

Will entered the auditorium already dazed and embittered. The bus ride here had been miserable; un-air-conditioned, noisy, the smell of perfume and sweat heavy. He had been forced to hold his bag on his lap the whole ride, someone had actually sat next to him. Emerging from the hell of that bus, the greatest pleasure Will had known in months, washed over him. The overcast sky and rain leaden clouds cooled him but did not manage to soothe his threadbare nerves.

The air within the small auditorium vibrated with the susurrations of the hundred or so other students fumbling amongst one another in their rush to the back row. The middling seats, Will observed, held the pre-med students attending today's lecture. All preparing to take notes, many of them forwent conversation in favor of plucking pens from pockets or laptops from bags.

The sea of people wavered in and out of focus. A small but ferocious headache began to bloom in the back of Will's skull. Jostling his glasses in an attempt to massage the bridge of his nose, Will hastened to put out the hot coals of pain nestled firmly against his brain.

A couple pushed past Will bubbling over about weekend plans. He managed to hold in his cringe as their bodies scraped against his own. Will recognized the girl, she had sat behind him on the bus; though she spoke too often for his tastes, he appreciated her hair; loose dark waves. He nearly made a gesture of acknowledgment but she had already slipped back into the uniform mass of collared shirts.

The room, though large and meant to accommodate such swarms of people collapsed in on itself. As the walls constricted and pressed the population of students closer and closer; Will felt his ribs doing the same to his lungs.

Moving out of the doorway, Will jostled his way to the first available seat. Front row, multiple buffer seats. Once Will settled, the room came back into focus and the fog about his brain evaporated.

Some long-dead architect had structured the room less like a Lecture Hall and more like the sorts of Victorian operating theaters Will often dreamt himself being led into. Will stepped into the familiar nightmare.

The rows of wooden benches sans desk stretched back past some vanishing point Will couldn't make out at his current angle. The sharp cut of a railing split each row. The only sort of lighting in the room came from a single-tiered chandelier over the center of the circular room. Theatrical. Voyeuristic. And most likely the real thing, given the age of the school. Will thought that if he listened closely enough, drowned out the chatter of classmates, he would pick up on the sonic afterimage of echoed screams of patients once flayed in this anatomical amphitheater.

The room did quiet infinitesimally once all the students took seats. Will fidgeted with his own notebook, a back and white marbled thing creased at every edge. He opened to a blank page

and scrawled out the title of this lesson ‘Time in Death.’

He meant to add a subtitle of sorts, maybe the date, maybe take to scribbling at the bottom of the page, when he noticed a presence beside him.

Will looked up, careful to keep his eyes trained on the bridge of the man’s nose. The slight grin Will caught on the man’s face unsettled him.

“Hello?” Will questioned more than greeted, closing his notebook lest this classy stranger get a look at his cacography.

“Hello. Do you mind if I sit for a moment?”

Will, in truth, did mind quite a bit. Strangers, unless they stood over a body with blood under their nails, rarely interested Will Graham.

“I’m supposed to say no,” Will muttered back, averting his gaze and flipping open his notebook again, tilting it to keep its contents to himself.

“And what do you want to say?” the stranger asked in his accented voice. Will flicked his gaze back to the man, that same self-satisfied grin graced his face.

“That I don’t work well with company.”

“And why is that?”

This time Will closed his notebook with enough force to cause a satisfying ‘smack’, and, with a sigh, balanced it on his thigh and tucked his pen behind his ear.

“I find them distracting. Too many questions. Do we exchange names or not? Are they looking at me? Do I look back? Does my hair look odd from that angle? Do we talk or do we not?”

“Well, we have answered the last question. We do talk, it seems. Your hair, I would say-”

Will, fed up with the stranger's pretensions, made to adjust his glasses, knocking the pen from behind his ear. It clattered to the floor.

“Are you sitting or not?”

“I have yet to be invited,” The man knelt in one graceful movement and plucked the pen off the tiled floor. He held it out to Will between two fingers like a cigarette, “Have I paid my dues?”

Will gave a terse nod and snatched the pen back. He set back to work on revising his notes from the previous week's classes. A week his professor had been talking up this little field-trip-like excursion and yet so far it had only managed to rattle him and throw him into the path of frankly annoying strangers.

“What sort of pen is it? I believe the sort of pen one uses says quite a bit about him.”

Will scoffed at this. “Ballpoint, plastic, don’t tell me you use a fountain pen.”

“I do. What does that say about me?”

“Form over function. Aesthetics matter to you.” Will delivered, sardonic. Hoping some comment would be biting and bitter enough to put the issue to rest.

“And if I told you the pen was ivory?”

“Egotistical. Those who know you well say you lack compassion”

“And that it were part of a set?” The man asked, leaning in, dark eyes bright.

“Obsessive. You like order. Crave symmetry. You like things holistic. Did you buy them yourself?” Will wondered aloud.

“I did”

“Rich--You’d like others to know that. Is it a power thing, you need control?” Will couldn’t stop himself now, and the man beside him seemed only to encourage Will’s efforts to ward him off.

“I fear that may be so.”

“Number 5,” Will muttered, dropping his gaze.

“You are referring to the careers that attract psychopaths?”

Will didn’t respond--he had not exactly meant for the man to hear his comment, but he wasn’t much bothered by it either.

“In that case, I can claim 9 as well.”

“Aren't you talented.” Will mocked.

“As an aesthete, the culinary arts appeal to me.”

“There's a sense of control there too, in a kitchen. Eating is… intimate. You like getting inside people. You fill them up, and then enroll to learn to cut them up.” Will, satisfied with the following silence, turned back to his notes and began scribbling nonsense, making a point of looking busy.

“Are you a student of the medicinal arts or one of the visiting agents in training?”

“Take a guess.” Will had meant for his comment to freeze out the offending party, instead, it seemed to inspire close scrutiny. He could feel the other man shift so as to get a better look at his face.

“FBI, then. One of my students would never speak to me with such a tone.” though the words were chastising, the doctor delivered them with an easy sort of laugh; a tone that implied that

he and Will were in on some sort of joke.

“Oh, um my apologies Dr. Lecter.” Will did risk a look at Lecter's eyes now, they simmered with amusement.

“Not necessary.”

The two fell silent as Will searched for something to say and the good doctor basked in the young man’s discomfort.

“I’ve heard a lot about you.” Will settled on, eyes now trained on his own shoelaces.

“And I you, Will Graham.”

Will sat up straighter at this, the general din of the room seemed to fall away.

“And what things have you heard, doctor? Rumors are vicious.”

“Those in my field are well aware of your work. We have an interest in broken bodies in common. Tell me, Will, what makes you so special that the academy lets you out of class and into the field so often? What sort of bloodhound are you?”

Someone a few rows up coughed and Will bristled at the sound.

“I see things differently, more clearly. Make the sort of jumps others can’t. Where does your renown stem from, Dr. Lecter? Do you stitch people up that well?”

“My patients would tell you yes.”

“Ever lost someone?” Will asked, rolling the recovered pen between his fingers.

“Not yet, no. Have you?”

“No. Not yet.”

With that the doctor rose, and only then did Will notice his long white coat. Slouching back against the railing behind him, Will closed his eyes for a moment; the whole painfully awkward ordeal played out again against his eyelids. Will suspected the doctor must think him an idiot, unqualified.

Dr. Lecter, now standing in the middle of the room, commanded attention. He stood tall, straight-backed; a regal stance. The lights cast harsh shadows over his face, his cheekbones prominent enough to shade his cheeks. He looked haunting. Will cut his eyes away, the image formidable. The personable, warm humor the Doctor had employed with Will had gone cold as he began to speak.

Will, too focused on the form of Dr. Lecter, the rise and fall of his voice, his tone, the dark air accumulating around him, realized a full three minutes into the lecture, that he had not taken a single note nor really made sense of anything the doctor had said. With quiet exasperation,

Will ran a hand through his hair and set to work trying to transcribe the remains of the lecture.

“Bodies exist in time. It is the medium of life, and of death. Time flows through everything and leaves its marks in cell decay, microflora, broken capillaries, and pooled blood. and so, we can-” There was something about him. Will’s mind ached with sureness.

Will could imagine Lecter’s hands over a body easily; could imagine his hands wrapped around a scalpel; could see him severing skin from bone. Though he had a harder time imagining those hands doing good. Will doubted any family had ever sent him a thank you letter. The images flashed in rapid succession before him; a zoetrope of violence. Will no longer watched the Man speak but rather beheld in gory splendor the doctor pulling apart a corpse. Careful, measured incisions; always the aesthete.

It wasn’t until Will closed his eyes to the outside world for a brief flicker of a moment that he realized he had slipped so deep into his own imagination. The true flesh and blood doctor continued on in measured tones as Will’s phantom version of the man spread ribs and exposed offal. Will opened his eyes, only to be met by the direct stare of Dr. Lecter. Dropping his gaze, Will returned to his notes, hoping Lecter wouldn’t think he had dozed off. The lecture interested Will, only, Lecter parsing flesh intrigued Will more than his parsing of words. Will adjusted his jacket.

The doctor opened the floor for questions. A few eager students asked questions that seemed prewritten in their perfect delivery. Lecter answered each wholly and drew at least three conclusions from each; a microcosmic thesis derived from each student-posed topic.

A shuffling began, bags being zipped up, benches creaking from the shifting in weight, but Will had missed why.

“Partners if you will, groups of three work as well,” Lecter called out over the sea of movement as he made his way back to Will.

Will glanced up at the man, “Yes?”

“My bag,” The doctor nodded towards the leather briefcase at the foot of the seat the doctor had occupied some twenty minutes before.

“It’s nice.” Will tried, unsure of what to say.

“Maxwell Scott Lesolo, it’s reliable.”

Lecter shouldered the bag, “No partner Will?”

Will shrugged, “I guess not.”

“You’ll need one for the next activity, no friends in the class?”

“No. Worst in class find me off-putting, best in class find me threatening. I’m not exactly in the best position to make friends”

Lecter resumed his seat next to Will and leaned in conspiratorially, close enough that Will had to fight the urge to lean away.

“Ask me.” The doctor grinned, eyes crinkling at the corners. Head tilted forward, a few strands of delicately placed hair fell forward. The picture comforted, charmed. An attractive image, but false in some way Will couldn’t name. Something in Will’s stomach churned.

“We aren't friends.”

“Aren't we?”

Will made to stand up, “We aren't.”

“You’ve exchanged more words with me than anyone else in this room. Surely that counts for something?”

This earned an exasperated laugh from Will as he closed his notebook and shoved the rest of his academic paraphernalia back into his own bag.

“I like your bag as well.”

“Thanks, it’s reliable too, but I’d embarrassed myself if I shared the brand name.”
A silence fell as the two stood face to face. A number of the students stood ready to exit the auditorium; all paired off.

“Seems like I’m your only option, Will.”

“It does seem that way. Lab partners?” Will asked, trying not to stress the awkward highschool-ish feel of the last two words.

“Of course.”

The sterility of the lab shocks Will, the antithesis to the dark woods of the previous room. Well lit and spacious with pure white walls, Will had to squint. Students pour into the room and per the doctor's instructions settle themselves by the numerous autopsy tables. Each supports the vague outline of a body cloaked in a black body bag. The vague undulations of the human form stand out and strain against the plastic.

Will follows behind Dr. Lecter, half terrified of stepping on his Italian leather-clad heels, avoiding the questioning gaze from his classmates. Somehow, despite his deliberate efforts to fade into the background he always ended up being the center of attention. He could feel the weight of questioning and leering gazes alike following him as he and Dr. Lecter made their way to the front of the classroom.

Will kept his gaze glued to the man’s back. When he turns to face the class, Will watches his hands ghost over the body bag, unzip it, and flit over bare flesh.

Will acknowledged the doctor, saw that he spoke; explaining the lesson and giving the sort of instruction he would soon be called to act upon in front of the man, but he couldn't focus on the words.

Everyone watched him. The feeling crawled along his skin, hot and tortuous. All those eyes, all those lives, all those disparate souls with their different minds, goals, and opinions of Will stared him down. He could feel false versions of himself being created, fleshed out in the minds of his classmates; like being ripped in half, in fourths. Or so it felt, Will, reminded himself that, in all likelihood, his classmates watched the dexterous movements of the doctor's fingers as he plodded along the body before him. Will stood mute at his side and prayed Lecter would put a stop in his flowing speech soon.

"Will?" the fog of his own nerves dampened the sound.

"Yeah? Sorry," Will answered, trying to clear his mind and shake off the lingering feeling of being seen. He pulled on the examination gloves and let the snap of the latex against his wrist draw him back to reality. He watched Lecter mirror the action, snaps and all.

Lecter held the scalpel by the blade, gleaming handle towards Will; an offer.

"Would you like to make the first incision?"

He asked, His voice gentile, courteous, almost chivalrous. Will took hold of the scalpel. Lecter dropped his gaze to Will's hands.

Will had seen any number of mangled bodies; flesh peeled back to purify, bones chiseled, limbs mutilated, offal exposed. He had watched each broken corpse be carried to the morgue and he had watched coworkers make cuts anew, but Will had never been the one holding the knife.

"Starting with the Y-incision" came Hannibal's voice, comforting and cajoling.
Will placed the tip of the knife to the man's left shoulder, the knife tip trembled against the pale flesh. Hannibal reached around Will and traced the line Will should follow with a finger. Will nodded and pressed down into the canvas of skin before him.

Would it feel like how he imagined it would, to cut flesh?

Will dropped the knife, it landed with a soft thump against the man's chest. In its mirror of a blade, Will caught a glimpse of his own startled reflection.

'Will?" Lecter asked behind him.

"Sorry, it slipped." Will tried, mortified, pushing up his glasses with the back of his wrist, careful to keep his gloves out of his face.

"It did not." He stated, reaching for the knife and placing it back in Will's grip, "This man is already dead. You can hardly do more damage to him." The doctor reminded in an attempt to soothe Will.

“That's not- It was- I’m not afraid I’ll hurt him.” Will managed as Lecter fit the knife back into his unsteady grip.

“What are you afraid of then?”

“That I’ll know,” Will muttered, eyes fixed on the harsh glint of the steel knife.

Lecter leaned in, a breath away from Will, “Know?”

“I imagine this- this violence often. But I don’t know. I’ve never known.”

“You fear that it will alter the way you imagine the feel of cutting flesh?” Will could hear the smile in the doctor's voice, just this side of pitying.

“I fear that it won’t.”

“May I?” Lecter reached out with one hand to grip Will’s wrist, encompassing it and set the other hand on the younger man’s shoulder. A guide. A teacher.

“Now, the Y-Incision.”

With the added pressure of the doctor's hands--warm through the gloves-- Will broke the skin. The smallest bead of blood welled up under the point of the blade. Will shuddered and the doctor nearly against him, he must have felt it.

“To the sternum now, Will,” he instructed as if Will wasn’t shivering away--into pieces-- under his grip.

Hands conjoined, Will let his hand be pulled down in a steady line towards the center of the cadaver's chest.

“Good,” Lecter praised, low and genuine, into Will’s ear, “Tell me, how correct were your imaginings? Were your assumptions true?”

“Yes.” Will feels it spill out of his mouth more than he feels himself say the word.

“How do you feel?”

“Powerful.” Will bearly mouths, but the doctor catches it.

Lecter draws Will’s hand up to the cadaver’s other shoulder and makes the twin cut almost without Will noticing, “You should. You are alive and he is dead.”

Will doesn’t tense up against the doctor's touch but he does shake his head at the man’s words.

“That’s not a very reassuring thing to hear, doctor,” Will mumbled, watching as Lecter worked vicariously through Will’s hands. Both cloaked in blue latex, Will momentarily forgot which set of hands belonged to himself.

“It may not be comforting, but it's honest. You value honesty, Will, do you not?”

“I value empathy.”

Lecter hummed, mulling the sentiment over like a fine wine, he appeared to find it palatable enough; he lifted Will’s hand again and brought it to the conjuncture of the two like cuts.

“Does empathy serve you well, Will? Do you find it hard to keep on a leash?”

Will snorted at this. The number of dog-related metaphors Dr. Lecter had employed in their short acquaintance amused him.

“Fond of dogs?” Will could feel the huff of the other man's laugh on his neck, but he didn’t flinch or bristle at the reminder of their physical closeness, though, the most imperceptible of shivers trickled down his spine.

“No, but you are.”

Will turned to face Lecter with a questioning look, eyebrows furrowed. Doing so, brought his face in such close proximity to the doctor that he could make out the fine creases in the man’s face. Turning back to stare down at the corpse before him--an easier task and less disconcerting than meeting the doctor’s eyes--Will lifted his own hand and shook off the doctor’s and finished the final cut himself.

“What makes you say that?” Will muttered, wiping off the knife with a cloth that reminded him of the hospital blankets they wrap infants in.

Lecter crossed the small distance between them and plucked at a single strand of fur from just above the loop of Will’s belt buckle. The nothing-pressure of the finger skimmed delicately; Will started at it.

“How many do you keep?” The doctor asked, removing his gloves and dropping them in the little biohazard bin at the end of the table. He plucked a new pair from the short box beside it.

“They're not mine. I live in a dorm. I walk dogs in my spare time. It’s decent pocket money. I don’t exactly have my own ivory pens.”

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Together the two men work their way through the contents of the man’s body. They spread ribs, prod at the un-beating heart, worked their way through the lace of this man’s veins. They worked side by side, bumping hips or elbows every now and again and though Will couldn’t help but startle at the contact, Lecter didn’t inspire the slow creeping dread within his skin others did when they touched him; rather, in its place, there a surprising heat unfurled at each point of contact.

“Have you discovered a cause of death, Will?” the doctor asked, a real curiosity in his voice.

“I find it hard to do that sort of thing with company.”

“Why is that?”

Will grabbed at the knife and sent it clattering to the floor. The doctor knelt to get it, dropped it into the sharp objects bin, discarded his gloves, replaced them, and produced a new knife in one graceful move.

“Sorry,” Will mumbled wondering at this man’s strange habit of holding the knife by its blade. He received the knife again as the doctor resumed his position beside Will.

“You have yet to answer my question.” Lecter reminded, not unkindly, but clearly unwilling to drop the line of questioning.

“What I do, the way I see tends to make for a bad first impression. Ask any of my co-workers.” Will gave a sad little chuckle.

Lecter raised a tempered eyebrow.

“This is where my empathy serves me, Doctor. I imagine, vividly, murders. I have a very accurate imagination.”

“And so, the agents come calling when a killer eludes them. Do your imaginings often prove correct?”

“Always.”

“And this comes naturally to you?”

“I interpret the evidence. Differently, sure.” Will concedes, “but that’s all it is. Anyone could do it if they looked closely enough.” Will knew he sounded defensive and let out a breath he hadn't noticed himself holding.

“I don’t mean to sound so on edge, it’s just” and Will wondered if he should really be sharing all this with what amounted to a perfect stranger, “I get asked a lot about how I know what I know, see what I see.”

The doctor appraised the man before him and Will struggled to place the emotion on the man’s face; a sort of interest. Narrowed eyes. Pursed lips. Lecter wrestled with something about him. Will watched the doctor pick him apart.

“Are you shocked by what you see--what plays out in the bone arena of your skull? Do they follow you home, those stray thoughts?”

Will frowned, his whole face partaking the action, “What breed of curiosity is this? Professional? Let me warn you, doctor, I’ve had all sorts of professionals try to get a handle on my thoughts. It doesn’t work.”

“Purely personal, Will. Tell me, what do you see when you look at this body?”

Will glanced down at the body again and prodded around the corpse for a moment, trying to ignore the weight of Lecter's expectant gaze. He pushed a hand under the ribs to clutch at the heart; picturesque. The valves had yet to collapse, the pristine color proclaimed itself in haughty reds and pinks. It looked like a model; something out of a textbook. He massaged the ventricles noticing the bizarre firmness of it. The rest of the organs were as pristine and as unforgiving to touch.

"Toxicology?"

"Silicone found in the blood. Nothing else."

Will looked back at the man, "In the blood, or in the organs?"

The doctor smiled back at him, "Clever boy, Will. In both. You feel the firmness, yes?"

"They released a murder victim to a school?" Will wondered aloud.

"Often victims are. If a body goes unclaimed, they wind up here, before you and me. Before my students."

Will looked down at the face of the man before him, flayed open, heart in his hand. A youthful face gazed blankly up at him. Regular, but handsome enough. He had a sort of all American chin, cheeks still plump with baby fat yet to be chiseled away.

Will, in all his fascination with the doctor and the lesson, hadn't realized he had been working away on a teenager; someone who had just come into the budding prime of his life. Though Will had seen a number of murders much more depraved than this, he felt something akin to sadness stir within his own rib cage as he retracted his hand from the boy's.

"No one claimed him." Will echoed and closed his eyes.

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Will watched the body before him close itself back up as if stitched up by invisible hands. The ribs closed like a maw over the heart and lungs. The Y-incision zipped itself back up. The broken thing before Will made itself anew. Whole and alive, Will realized how ideal this boy was. Of trim, lean figure. Of narrow, v lined hips. Of broad shoulders. He filled the role of Son in that mythic ideal of the American Family. Neat. A textbook boy.

Will approached this boy, withdrew a needle filled with nothing but a low-grade anesthetic, and jabbed it into the boy's neck. Against him, the warm body struggled for life. Scratched at him, kicked, spasmed. Screamed and screamed, "no not yet." and then the moment of unconsciousness came upon the boy like a release and he stilled in Will's arms.

Will watched his hands open the boy up with hairline slices along the rib cage, abdomen. His apertures made Will deposited silicone gel via sterile syringe. Will would preserve him. This boy had attained perfection in youth; too good, too picturesque, too useful to be allowed to age out of this state. Will hates even to scar him. With careful strokes, Will massages the cuts,

slathers on gels, keeps the body out of the sun. He doesn't let him die until the scars are invisible. It's the silicone poisoning that ultimately kills him.

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"Will?" a voice, smeared, far away. There it sounded again as Will admired his work; his design. This perfect model with all it's perfect organs prettily preserved within.

"Will?" came the voice again, and oh, here Will came again; beside the doctor, in a room full of occupied students. Here he panted and shook before a man he had just met who definitely had a professional curiosity in him as much as he denied it and who looked at him like wounds riddled Will and-- fuck! Why did Will let Dr. Lecter talk him into this?

"Are you alright?" The doctor asked, a hand lighting upon Will's upper back. He shrugged off the touch and stepped away from the table.

"I told you this tends to estrange people. You worried about my stability?" Will spat, turning away from the hand.

Lecter raised a defensive hand, "not at all. You seem very stable to me. Perhaps drained, but well otherwise."

"Your curiosity sated now?" Will asked aching to run a hand through his hair, but unable on account of his blood doused hands.

"You have whet my appetite."

"Great." Will huffed, peeling off his gloves and grimacing at the dampness of his hands. He tossed them out before crossing to the other side of the table to avoid the 'accidental' touching. Will gripped the edges of the cool metal and leaned across the space, "Ask away, Doctor."

Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Will stood, bracing himself against the table between them. He waited for the force of impact of some too-personal question. Will nearly shuts his eyes in anticipation, blood thrumming through his veins. He's preparing himself for some sort of fight, warry and on the defensive.

Will had gotten used to the sorts questioning his gift often garnered. The most common, of course, were usually abstractions of "are you a psychopath." Often people would avoid him; vanish from Will's life with little explanation. Several girlfriends, a few acquaintances, a best friend, had all deemed it necessary to slip away into some realm of existence Will wasn't permitted to follow them into. Deflection and defensiveness came easily to Will.

Nothing comes.

"Why don't we finish our lesson."

Will glanced up at the doctor, his own gaze meeting the man's for a moment. The crinkles of amusement framing Lecter's eyes made Will squirm. He felt pinned down like some rare butterfly encased in glass and hung on the wall of Lecter's office. Will got the feeling that he wouldn't be alone on that imagined wall. Lecter studied him, poking, questioning, without saying a word.

Realizing he had escaped the potential onslaught upon the inner workings of his brain--the way the gears halted, ground, started and stopped--Will loosened his grip. Lecter's exploration would be more delicate.

His white-knuckled hands responded slowly to his flexing of each, stiff from the harsh grip he had had on the metal. Will hid the resuscitation of his hands behind his back.

"No questions, then?" Relief still flooding through his system, like catching his breath.

"We shouldn't leave your classmates waiting. It would be unprofessional of me." Will might have been mistaken, but for the life of him, it looked as if the doctor had punctuated his line with a wink. Cutting his gaze to the rest of the room, Will noticed a few of the students had finished with their autopsies and chatted amongst themselves.

Frowning, Will picked up the knife he had tossed aside. He examined it between his blood-soaked fingers; wondered how many other students had gripped it, pale and half-sick at what they were about to do.

"Are you going to ask what I saw?" Will watched his reflection in the short blade, noted his own paleness, the sweat beading on his forehead.

"Would you like me too?"

"I assumed you'd be curious."

Lecter smiled at this, replaced his gloves once again, and leaned back over the body. Will wondered at the fact that Lecter hadn't shown any discomfort at the smell or the gore bothering him. He seemed as placid here as he had lecturing.

"I am. You present an interesting puzzle. Please lift the liver, here Will." watching Lecter's expectant face, he approached cautiously, as if the doctor were some sort of predatory animal. Closing the space with a single step, Will's hip bones pressed into the chilled table. Skimming his finger along the edge of the organ, Will hooked his index beneath it and lifted, giving Lecter access to the stomach.

"Like this," The doctor murmured, adjusting Will's hands, his grip firm and clinical, "though, if you do not wish to share your thoughts, there is not much I can do. I do not believe in prying."

"Why do you care? If the body went unclaimed, there's not much you or I could do," Will shrugged, and he felt the liver slip ever so slightly. Hannibal paused his work to readjust Will's hand once more.

"you're a perfectionist," Will said under his breath, focused on the careful yet sure movements of the doctor's hands.

"One must be in this line of work." Lecter chided, "Care is too strong a word, I am fascinated. You have a unique gift. Your mind must present you with many unsavory things; perhaps it would be helpful to share."

Will let out a breath, somewhere between a laugh and a sigh, careful all the while to keep his hand perfectly still as he did, "My thoughts are not often savory, no. And trust me, I share enough. My boss has me sharing with all sorts of people. Doesn't help."

"Do you see one therapist regularly, Will?" and great, now he looked concerned, eyebrows drawn together, gaze flicking from one of Will's eyes to the other. Searching.

"There is a… rotation of people who share a curiosity about me."

"This rotation, is it regular?"

"Like clockwork."

"A bond of trust is an important part of therapy. Regularity is not a substitute for trust."

"I'm aware, Dr. Lecter." Will risked another glance at those eyes. When he looked up, Hannibal already had his eyes locked on Will's face.

"You have yet to make these bonds. Their faces float away from you the moment they walk out of the room. They are as insubstantial as mist."

Will gave a sardonic grin, "What gave me away?"

"You would know all the tricks. You are not so easily led," Lecter paused and held out a hand to Will, the warmth in his voice dampened--gone clinical again.

"The knife? And two clamps."

Will obliged, all the while keeping his wrist perfectly frozen; still, the other man found a reason to correct it, one finger carefully ghosting over his pulse.

"You don't have to worry about me fainting, doctor."

The slightest trace of surprise flickered over Lecter's features, "My apologies."

Handing over the requested supplies, Will watched on as Lecter easily cut and clamped both ends of the stomach and gingerly removed it from the body.

At Will's look of confusion, Lecter launched into a pre-prepared monologue about the importance of examining stomach contents to Will's own field of study.

"That won't be important here," Will muttered as the doctor began to prep a workspace.

"And why is that?" Lecter's curiosity piqued.

So, Will was going to have to explain what he saw anyway. With the back of his wrist, Will wiped at his forehead, "He wouldn't have had allergies. He was a clean eater. He preserved his body well." Will bristled at the staccato of his own voice. At the tilt of Lecter's head, Will clamped his mouth shut.

"It's, uh, not necessary."

"And this killer, he preserved the body as well. Did he not?"

Will licked his lips, eyes skittering across the body, uncertain of where to land, "Yes. It would be a waste not to."

"A waste?" Lecter had set down the organ; Will flinched at the soft wet sound of its contact with the table.

"All of this is about preservation. Things fall apart too quickly when left alone. I'm keeping him together. He doesn't know what's waiting--what time will do to you. I am saving him." and he was. The struggling, the screaming, none of that made sense. This boy, this perfect boy, would stay that way. He would help him. Protect him from the weathering of the world. Keep him clean.

"Do you see yourself as the killer when you imagine crimes, Will?"

He startled, his thoughts vanishing like a vapor, "What?"

"You said I. I am saving him." The doctor explained calmly as if reviewing some educational material.

Will turned from him, moving to where the stomach lay prone and clamped like deli meat, "Let's finish the lesson."

Will watched as Lecter visibly made the decision to drop the subject. The slight parting of lips, the uptick of brows succumbing to a resigned tight-lipped smile.

"Let's."

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The bus ride home irks Will considerably less. He finds himself drifting in and out of a restless half-sleep, wholly unconscious of that hotbox of a bus.

His head pressed against the cool glass of the window, the little metal lining below cutting into his cheek.

Will's mind lingers on the illusory, shifting image of the doctor's wry smile playing out against the back of his eyelids. And there was blood too, that single first drop that welled up like a tear at the fine point of Will's trembling knife.

The smell of the room--antiseptic, bleach, metal--lingered on his clothing, and every time he shifted in his seat, he caught a whiff of it. The oversocialized dead air clung to him, and even after Will left the bus, left his class, and took a scalding shower, it lingered.

The deep blues of evening colored the sky outside Will's windows by the time he left the bathroom. Steam hung heavy in the bathroom air, Will flicked on the fan out of courtesy for the student in the next room over who shared the too cramped bathroom. Comforted by the monotonous hum that filled the eerily silent air, Will set to work toweling his hair dry and pulling on his threadbare sweatpants. Droplets of rapidly cooling water ran in rivulets down his back; he tugged on a t-shirt nonetheless.

He tried not to trip over the debris of his life scattered haphazardly across the carpeted floor--books, papers, piles of clothing clean and dirty, soda cans.

Kicking the clutter aside, Will made his way to his small wooden desk--equally smothered in a whole mess of papers and textbooks--and started up his laptop.

Sure, Will knew a bit about the doctor. European, educated in France at some big-name medical school--the sort you work your whole life towards--specializing in the cutting edges of the field; face transplants, Craniectomy. Lecter's main claim to fame, his mastery of a multitude of medical fields, only irked Will. He couldn't settle for just being the leading cardiologist in the country, he also had to go and try his hand at spinal cord surgery, perhaps become a lead researcher in the decomposition of bodies.

"Overachiever," Will mumbled to himself, leaning back in his chair, the hard wooden back digging into his shoulder blades. He shifted again, but couldn't find a comfortable position.

Will continued scrolling, unearthing accolade upon accolade. Apparently, it had been his artwork that had first caught the eye of Johns Hopkins, artwork that had now been picked up by a few museums. Sketches to rival the Vitruvian Man. Will rolled his eyes, made to close his computer before something caught his eye; a link to Lecter's own website.

The home page included a long list of those very accomplishments Will had just scoffed over. A photo of Lecter, assuming that same regal stance he had before Will's class. He looked down the lens of the camera half-amused as if he read Will's own annoyance with himself.

Beside the photo under a bold heading reading, "patient reviews," sat a list of a few hundred comments about the doctor's skill and affability. "I never felt in safer hands," "His work has changed my life," "Without Dr. Lecter, my daughter would be dead."

Hyperlinks to articles that showered the good doctor with praise lined the bottom of the page. "A conversation with Dr. Hannibal Lecter, Surgeon, Artist, and Writer," "10 of the Smartest People in Healthcare," "Hannibal Lecter; by the Books."

Will physically cringed, recalling every painful second of their encounter. What had Will called him? Egotistical, Obsessive. Will groaned and pressed the heels of his hands against his eyes. The embarrassment dizzied him.

Will had ruined, what seemed to be, the chance of a lifetime. A chance to impress greatness himself; perhaps ingratiate himself with that circle of intellectuals Hannibal so gracefully navigated. But what had Will done? He had insulted the man, spent the lecture lost in thought, and nearly had a panic attack in front of him. Not to mention all of this transpired in clear view of his already wary classmates.

Perhaps Will should have done his homework. He shut the laptop with a resounding smack.

Nearly tripping over a sweatshirt in his haste, Will tossed himself onto his bed. A pile of papers lay at the foot of it, he kicked them off, watching them flutter and settle on the ground like so many dead leaves. Arm firmly over his eyes, Will prayed for sleep to come quickly and put an end to his suffering, only for a sharp knock to pull him back from the brink of oblivion.

"What," Will groaned, laboring to pull himself out of bed. Friday nights were usually silent, everyone gone off-campus for drinks.

The knock came again, "Hold on," he muttered, making a labor out of the short distance he had to cross to open the door.

Upon seeing who awaited him, Will sighed a breath of relief; Beverly stood with two packages of ramen in hand and two precariously balanced mugs in the other. Clad in sweats and her class shirt still-wet hair dampening the collar, she looked the picture of absolute comfort.

"Dinner?" she asked, already unloading the mugs on to Will.

"Please," Will huffed as he kicked shut his door behind them.

"What's gotten into you?" Beverly questioned, "You had a field trip, didn't you? You don't have the right to look this tired." She kept up a steady stream of questions about his day as he invited her in. With the aid of bottled water and his microwave, Will prepared their meal.

"What was he like? A couple of people in my class were jealous of you guys; he's got quite a fanbase."

Will scoffed, "People are fans of surgeons now?" he handed Beverly her mug.

"Sure they are. Or they like his art. Or they read one of his books."

Will set down his fork mid-bite, "He writes?"

"God, Will, he's on your syllabus. Everyone reads something by him at some point."

Will realized that maybe people weren't avoiding the front row out of disinterest but out of fear. The general chatty anxious nature of his classmates had been born out of a certain stark struck anticipation. Will had misread the room.

Will put his head in his hands, fingers digging into his face, "I should have done my research."

"What did you say to him that's got you all self-flagellating?" Beverly set her fork down.

Will looked up at this, "What makes you think I said something?"

A smile bloomed on her face despite her best efforts to suppress it, "You always say something."

"Isn't that comforting." Will stabbed at the contents of his mug.

"Out with it."

"I told him, he… that he was egotistical. Obsessive. An aesthete with a need to show off." Will took a breath, all the air in the room suddenly insufficient.

"I'm sure he's gotten that before." And Will isn't sure if she is trying to comfort him or rub in the fact that without a doubt, Will had probably said some of the rudest things the man had heard in recent memory.

"He was my um, lab partner."

Beverly's eyebrows shot up at that. She bit at the corner of her lip, another abortive attempt to reign in her grin.

Will explained his encounter to her, the whole time his eyes glued to the quickly dwindling contents of his mug. He noted the chip in the corner, the unevenness of the varnish, anything to keep himself from looking up at his incredulous friend.

"Well, at least that's it. You won't have to see him again."

"I get the feeling that's not true," Will had switched to looking at his feet.

Beverly had finished her cup and cleared a space on Will's desk to set it down, "you feel a lot of things. And usually your right, but I don't think your observational skills have awarded you clairvoyance." this got a chuckle from Will. "You're some kind of crazy, this isn't it."

Finishing his dinner in silence, he listened to Beverly recount her own grueling day, which, to Will, sounded preferable to the day he had survived.

Beverly soon left, leaving Will with her mugs, his turn to do the dishes, she claimed. Still, in a daze spurred on by exhaustion and social humiliation, Will fumbled his way back to bed.

Despite his eagerness to forget the whole day, Will couldn't help but pull out his phone and perform one final search on Hannibal Lecter. His own fascination confounds him.

Will breathes in the comforting scent of his sheets, half cheap laundry detergent, half his own sweat, and tries to close his eyes despite his blinding phone screen. In a huff, Will looks down at his phone once again and clicks on Lecter's website once again.

This time Will taps on the little "Contact" tab, still unsure of what spurred on his own actions. And there it was, both an email and a phone number to contact the man. Will felt ludicrous for even entertaining the thought of emailing him.

He mused over what exactly, he would say. He had no reason other than his own curiosity to contact him. Besides, what vast number of emails must Lecter receive? Patients, researchers, teachers, coworkers, artists, any number of people more worthy of his time and attention most likely reached out to Lecter in droves. Even if Will did send something, it would mostly find itself buried six feet deep under other more important contacts.

Still, the urge to send any sort of message in a bottle across the ocean of the internet kept him awake. Eventually, Will slides his phone under his pillow and commands his body to rest. Out of sight, out of mind.

Despite his efforts to divert his thoughts, his half-conscious mind, determined to linger on Lecter, thwarted his attempts.

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In his dreams, the wet feeling of pliant dead bodies plagues him.

They pile around him, the weight of a man's torso cast haphazardly over his foot, it halts him like a shackle around his ankle.

The smell unbearable hits him with astounding force. What little trace of rusty human smell had lingered on those prepped bodies in the lab intensified, the air thickening with it.

Will choked on the scent, but his arms remained stuck to his sides.

The darkness slunk in, and Will couldn't make out more than a few feet in front of him in the field of bodies.

A droplet of warm rain hit Will's hand. Fighting his own early onset rigor mortis, Will tilted his head to get a look at his hand.

A red stain marred the pale flesh. A twin droplet landed beside it. And then came the downpour.

Will did not so much as flinch at coppery streams that ran down his face, narrowly avoiding his eyes.

Out of the hazy dark emerged the figure of a man--his body formed of that same darkness. Beneath Will, the bodies shifted, pressing in against him. Time-yellowed nails grasped at his legs. His attempts to kick them off did little but spur their consumption on.

Wordlessly, the shadowed figure held out a hand. An invitation.

Without a moment's thought, Will grasped at it.

Chapter End Notes

Hello,
For those who are returning, thank you! it means the world!
If you enjoyed, let me know! It's reassuring to hear from your audience. If you have any sort of criticism, let me know that as well! I just love getting comments, they remind me my writing is being seen by real people!

Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Will's feet hit the ground hard and the vibration of his rubber souls striking the rain-damp concrete reverberated through his entire body.

He brought a hand up to wipe at his damp brow and with a laborious exhale he leaned into the pain of exertion and caught up with Beverly. His lungs burned and the dampness of the morning air only added to the feeling of drowning.

Will always dreaded morning laps. Poor sleeper that he was, all things morning were a sore spot for him.

He had rolled out of bed after a pitiful four hours of sleep to the gunfire knocks of Beverly pounding down his door. From that poor start, his morning had only descended further into a spiral of misery; he hadn't had time for coffee and had put on his least favorite sweatpants in his half-lucid state.

"What do you look so miserable about?" Beverly huffed between her own, much more even, footfalls.

"Nothing," Will breathed out, trying to match his pace to hers. She pressed ahead again.

Will arrived back to his room sore and winded. With sluggish limbs, he peeled his wet shirt off and tossed it on the floor in a heap. The rest of his clothing followed suit, each piece landing somewhere behind him in a vague trail to the ensuite bathroom.

Will stepped into the shower on aching feet. Even the scalding water failed to fully rid him of the deep tiredness that sat heavy and leaden in his bones.

Will leaned his shoulder against the tiled wall and closed his eyes, trying to allow the water to relax his muscles. By the time the steam had nearly choked Will and he was ready to towel himself off, his phone alarm rang out from the other room, alerting Will to the fact that class started in ten minutes

The time crunch spurred a burst of adrenaline. He dried off and dressed in record time and hauled himself and his book bag out the door.

Will walked through crowded hallways only half-aware of the swarms of bodies. A familiar face cropped up out of the corner of his eye occasionally, a few waved or gave a nod of recognition, but Will found himself uninterested in returning the gestures. Get to class, find his seat, avoid everyone else in the room.

From the moment Will sat down, he began counting the minutes until the end of class.

The classroom was poorly lit; the incandescent bulbs overhead nearing the end of their lives. The lights kept up a faint and monotonous humming that went unnoticed by everyone else in the room. To Will, it sounded like so many morbid flies; the sort drawn to crime scenes in back alleys and over-damp woods.

His teacher soon arrived, dropping her bag atop her desk with a resounding smack. Will flinched at the sound.

The room thrummed with chatting and the sound of thermoses being opened and closed ad nauseum. The faint whirr of a fan added to the white noise of the room. Will closed his eyes only to have his attention rudely pulled back to the room by a finger on his shoulder. He leaned away from the touch.

“Do you have a pencil?”

“No,”

“There’s two on your desk.” Will could hear the frown in the man’s voice.

“I need them both,” Will muttered, all the while refusing to turn around to get a look at the person speaking. Even if he did, it was unlikely that Will could have put a name to the face. Most of his classmates faded into a sort of faceless mass. Every now and again this mass would excite some curiosity, today was not one of those days.

Class went by quickly and the material interested Will just enough to keep him fully conscious. Apparently, he hadn’t looked all that interested as, come end of class, his professor called after him just as he slid out of his seat.

“Willam?”

Will closed his eyes a moment wondering if he could believably pretend not to have heard her. He settled on probably not, Professor Phyllis shared her husband’s unique ability to pick up on any minute sign of Will’s unwellness.

He turned to face her, his bag already slung over his shoulder, the little plastic buckle digging into his shoulder; ready to bolt the first chance he got.

“How are you?” She asked, perching on the edge of her desk, legs crossed, motioning for Will to take one of the seats at the front of the room.

She did this often, held Will after class, sat with him and gazed meaningfully as if she could derive something about the condition of his soul if she just looked at him hard enough. She and Alana were similar that way. A lot of people in Will’s life were similar that way.

“Will?”

“I’m fine. Good actually.” he tacked on the last two words a little too hastily and Will felt like kicking himself at the twitch of Phyllis’s eyebrow.

“Classes are going well?”

“You're the one grading my papers.”

His professor gave a small laugh at that, but her smile dissolved into a look of concern much too quickly for Will’s taste.

“You seemed distracted today.”

“I always seem distracted.”

“You seemed tired then.”

It was Will’s turn to laugh, less the soft and accommodating laugh Phyllis had let out, but more of a harsh and desperate sound.

“Your husband keeps me busy,” Will said, leaning back in the squeaky plastic chair and staring straight ahead at the whiteboards still decorated with Phyllis’s graceful penmanship. Social exclusion, read the top left corner. The recommended reading list carefully penned below it included WH Jones, WS DeKeseredy, and H Lecter.

Hannibal had followed him to class.

“You aren't on a case right now.”

Will leaned forward on the desk, resting his chin in the palm of his hand.

“They're never far from my mind.”

“Have you been losing sleep?” and by this, Will knew she asked about nightmares.

A month or so ago Will had put some of the school’s staff through quite a scare during one of his sleepwalking episodes. He had quietly padded his way down the halls and up a flight or two of stairs and made his way to the rooftop.

Reportedly, he hadn’t been standing near the edge. Will still questioned that piece of information, unsure how much the truth of the incident had been watered down to save him from expulsion.

Will was a fickle asset, easy to set off. Will understood he was useful in a way few other people were. Like one of those volatile bombs governments hoard, the FBI held on to Will partly to keep him out of other’s hands, partly because he was a novelty.

Will had been gifted a week off after that, during which the bureau kept Jack and well-meaning students at bay. He had left campus, lived in a motel, and drank more than he should have. Upon his return to school, Phyllis's after-class chats started.

At first Will had done his best impression of a happy, healthy, twenty-something, though he quickly learned that Phyllis wouldn’t fall for that. And so, they had entered into this, begrudgingly friendly on his part, deeply maternal on hers, relationship.

“Do you want coffee? I was about to go make some.” She picks up her empty mug, the one with the little cursive “love” etched across the face, a gift from her husband.

“Alana tells me that coffee frays my nerves. Puts me on edge.”

Phyllis stood and began walking out of the classroom as if she knew Will would follow.

“Since when do you listen to Alana?”

The breakroom, normally restricted to students--Will was a special case, Will was always a special case--looked remarkably similar to the classrooms. Same awful lighting, same cheap furniture, stained grey carpeting; the only differences being the lack of desks and the few couches shoved against the wall.

Will took a seat and watched as his professor popped open the lid of the Keurig beside the sink.

Removing his glasses, Will cleaned them with the edge of the blue cotton tee, happy to pull the uniform away from his skin. The deceptively soft-looking material itched all the same as soon as Will let go and allowed the fabric to cling to him once more.

“I’m going to miss my next class,” Will muttered in lue of a thank you as Phyllis handed him a mug. The warmth seeped into his hands; he hadn’t noticed the chill until then.

Will alternated between sipping and staring aimlessly into the inky black of the mug. He liked the way the pure white rim encompassed it, held it.

“I’ll write you a note then.” She sat beside Will.

“You know, you can say no to Jack.” She took a sip of her own coffee.

Will ran a hand absentmindedly over his chin, a faint, amused smile playing across his features, “Yeah, I don't think that’d go over well.”

“You're a student. An early admit at that. Jack is under my jurisdiction, I could-”

“I don’t need you handling my professional life. I’m fine. I just,” Will holds up his mug, “Needed a pick me up.” this, she rewarded with a frown.

“So you’ve not been sleeping well.”

Will sighs because it’s back to this again, and he doesn’t need another well-meaning pseudo mother rifling through the contents of his mind.

“I get to bed late.” Will settles on, “speaking of late,” he slides off the couch and gives the mug a quick rinse in the sink beside the still-humming Keurig.

“Will-” but he’s already out the door.

“I haven't heard from Jack in a while.” Alana Bloom began, easing into a discussion about Will’s work as she did every session. Will hated this, the speech that masqueraded as direct; both parties restricting themselves to common parlance so as not to spook the other.

Will hated this room and the cheery walls and the white wood; hated watching her watch him; Hated the click of her pen, and then hated himself for flinching at it visibly enough that she now brought only pencils to their sessions.

“Shame, the lack of violence in the area,”

“Shame.” Alana does an impression of her own laugh and Will sinks even further into himself. Stupid, stupid, he should have kept his mouth shut. What kind of person says that?

“And classes?”

He had come straight from school, still in the khakis and blue shirt. He fidgets with the collar. Will takes a moment to consider his response. Class had been proceeding as normal, which was to say poorly, but if nothing had changed, he didn’t need to tell her anything, did he?

He surveyed Alana, sitting proper behind her glass top desk. Legs crossed in her pencil skirt, blouse tastefully tucked in, uppermost button attractively undone. What response did she search for? Probably a simple, ‘good.’ People liked to hear that things were ‘good,’ that things, despite hardships, were proceeding just fine.

“Fine.”

“Fine?”

“Fine.”

She smiled knowingly, “Fine is a favorite word of yours Will”

“It’s versatile,” Will shrugs, picking at an imagined spot of lint on his shoulder.

Alana fluttered the pencil between her fingers, one of Will’s favorite mannerisms of hers.

“It’s avoidant.”

Will raised his eyebrows in mock surprise, “Really?”

“Tell me about school.” Alana flipped open her notebook, a simple pad with yellow pages and thin blue lines faint as veins.

“I did.”

“In other words then.”

Will stood, it would be easier if he wasn’t looking at her.

“We had a uh field trip” taking a breath, Will continued, hyper-aware of his every syllable.

“I met Hannibal Lecter,” Will expected an audible gasp to follow and when none did he turned from the thin bookshelf he had wandered towards. She smiled, affectionately, no, fondly.

“He’s a brilliant man.”

“So I've been told.”

Alana set her pencil on the desk, the pleasant sound of wood against wood, “We were colleagues for a short time.

Will wanted to probe that statement, but he sensed that questions about the doctor’s personal life crossed some invisible boundary.

“Did you get the chance to talk to him?”

“Yes.”

Alana tilted her head forward, eyebrows raised, a silent, “And?”

“And… and we worked together. I was how I am, but he uh didn’t seem offended.” Will by this point had traveled the length of the small room and gazed out the window. Vaporous blue curtains granted the two of them some privacy, but Will could still make out the vague shapes of parked cars and people coming and going.

“How ‘you are?’” she repeated.

“Anti-social. I insulted him--called him egotistical. He didn’t seem to mind.” Will wandered back to his chair, set himself on the edge of his seat.

“Maybe he found it charming” Will could hear the little coy smile in her voice--the way her lips ticked up and her eyes narrowed ever so slightly.

“I don’t tend to strike most people as charming,”

“Hannibal is an eccentric man, I imagine it would be difficult for anyone to assume his point of view. He is honest with the company he keeps.”

Will stands and makes his way back to the other side of the room, suddenly self-conscious, “We don’t keep company. We met for the first time yesterday.”

“But he interests you?”

“No.”

Alana pursed her lips as she always did when she thought Will lied.

“You shouldn’t deny yourself connection, however brief.”

“Hannibal and I didn’t make a connection, we-” Alana cut him off. A rare occurrence.

“What did you talk about?”

“After I insulted him?”

“After you insulted him.”

Will drifts back towards Alana’s desk and perches himself on the arm of one of the empty seats.

“The body mostly.” At Alana’s look of confusion, Will elaborates.

And there it is, that look Will hates so much but encounters everywhere he goes, pitty, worry, concern.

“He called me a bloodhound. We talked about therapy, he was uh, worried that I hadn’t established a bond of trust. But he didn’t seem concerned, just curious.”

“Do you want to talk about the body?” Alana suggested, quietly flipping the page of her notepad again.

“We talked about that too. He wanted to watch me.”

“How did that make you feel?” Will’s lips twitched up at that

“You sound like him.”

Alana resettled herself in her seat, her thin silver bracelets jangling as she reached up to place a stray strand of hair behind her ear, “We’ve had similar schooling. We are curious by nature.”

“He didn’t seem to be much of anything by nature. Dr. Lecter is constructed. Meticulously.”

“We all are, to a degree. I am a different person with you than I am with my family.”

“He didn’t want me to see him.”

“You have that in common, you and Hannibal.” Will looked up at that.

“I’m not hiding anything.” Will protested. Alana caught his eye, tilted her head, her eyebrows drew together.

“You might not feel that you are.”

“I know what I am, Alana. I’m not hiding.”

Alana ducked her head ever so slightly and jotted something down. The disadvantage of using a pencil? it's audibility.

“What did you write?”

She considered a moment, mouth working before she settled on honesty, “Issues with vulnerability.”

She watched him and she must have seen something cross his features because, suddenly, she was apologizing.

“You don't… you don’t need to do that.” Will stood, found himself back at the window. He felt like some exotic thing, caged. Her concerned silence rolled off her in waves. Will took the fabric of the gossamer curtain between his fingers.

“Will?” She said, soft, cajoling. He turned back to her.

“You confuse me.”

She sat forward in her chair, went through the motions of ‘showing compassion’ but Will could feel she wasn’t there. Not fully, not in any meaningful way.

“You… you oscillate between the personal and professional. I'm your patient, we both know that, but you don’t want me to see it. You’d like me to forget it. Let uh it fall away from my mind. I don’t understand that.” Will, without his own knowledge, had started pacing again.

“And… and I don’t know why everybody looks at me like that. Like that, you're doing it now.” at Alana’s quirked eyebrow, Will remembers himself, shoves his hands in his pockets, and slows his speech.

“Strangers do it a lot. Classmates. My teachers- this one, professor Phyllis? She keeps me after class and asks me these questions that she... She wraps up in these normal words like… like I can’t see right through that. I know what she wants to ask. I know what everyone wants to ask. Sometimes I wish they would just say it. But what I don’t get is… is the half-fear pity thing.”

“You incite sympathy,” Alana explains, calmly from her chair where she remains firmly seated as Will paces around her office, his boots keeping time on the hardwood floor.

Will finds purchase on the back of the chair in which he was meant to be sitting. He grips it, hard, and leans forward.

“It isn’t sympathy. I know what sympathy looks like. This isn’t it.”

“Then what do you see?” Alana asks from behind the curtain of her fine, chestnut waves. Will risks a glance at her eyes, shaded by her eyelashes, but still just as telling.

That look of apprehension, a fear he might break, that she might be the one to break him. The look called him fragile.

“What I see is concern,” Will said, “I don’t like being thought of as delicate.”

“Few people do,” Alana conceded, breaking eye contact to jot down a note.

“Considering what I do? I’d say I’m well adjusted.” Will resumed his seat as if it proved his point.

“Will,” Alana tried to catch his eye again, he refused to look,“You're rationalizing.”

“I'm aware.”

“It’s counterproductive to your therapy.”

Will leans back in his chair and gives a wry smile, “I specialize in behavioral science Dr. Bloom. I know.”

“It is often difficult to make sense of ourselves.”

“Is that why I have you?” Will doesn’t mean it to come across as genuine, but Alana interprets it so.

“Yes.”

The drive back to academy felt longer than the drive from; as if the roads stretched out along their jagged fault lines with the purpose of confining Will to the road. He wouldn’t complain. The second he got back to the dorms he would have to wade through at least a few hours worth of work.

The endless highway provided a liminal space as Will felt himself slip in and out of full consciousness. Perhaps this should worry him; driving at dusk while one attempts to separate from oneself is not advisable.

Will found he couldn’t care less. He smiled to himself, “self-destructive” Alana and Phyllis' voices rang out in his mind at once; a harmony of concern and disquietude.

The roads did come to an end however, the lively highways dwindling into sleepy byways.

Will sat in his car, unwilling to step out of his bubble of unreality. Opening his phone, he checked his notifications, a text from Beverly, an email from a professor. Will switched between tabs aimlessly. Without realizing it, without exactly meaning too, he had ended up on Lecter’s website again.

Will set his phone in his lap and gripped the faux-leather steering wheel with one hand. He dug his nails into the already flaking fabric.

He could write to him, explain who he was, and tell Lecter he couldn’t rid himself of the feeling of flesh under their conjoined hands. In all likelihood, the doctor wouldn’t read it, and Will, having indulged, could snuff out his interest.

Will shoved his phone in his pocket, having done nothing at all.

Chapter End Notes

Hello, Hello!

Some updates: I can reliably say that I will be posting every Wednesday. I wanted to try out the schedule before committing to it, and I can now say that it works well! Expect more next Wednesday!

If you enjoyed leave a comment or a kudos! They make my day :)

Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

His partner stared at him from across the room. Will counted his breaths, forcing his jumping diaphragm to still. He steadied himself; feet a shoulders width apart, his blue gun held steady in his grip. He stood with a straight back. Settling his gaze on the woman across from him, his fingers flexed around the grip.

His classmate, one wholly unfamiliar to Will, mirrored his stance, the only exception being the position of her gun. It hung loosely from her hand at her side. She awaited their instructor's command.

This exercise never failed to turn Will's stomach, it wasn't so much the genuine pain of rubber bullets that gave rise to such an aversion, rather, the false intimacy this position forced him and his partner into. Will had read somewhere an anecdote about eye contact and its meanings. Six seconds was natural, longer than that and you were supposedly ready to kill or fuck. Will, of course, didn't believe in that exact dichotomy, but the thought cropped up every now and again.

There too, was the much more pressing discomfort of pointing a gun at someone else's chest. It felt as though his dreams and imagination had seeped out into reality and pooled before him. Sometimes classmates wavered in and out of perfect concrete existence; their faces morphing into the recent ghosts of victims Will spent countless nights fending off in sleep.

"Begin giving commands," his teacher called from the sideline, his voice echoing off the walls and floor of the concrete room.

The bulletproof vest and face mask fit snugly against Will and chafed. He wet his lips and rolled his aching shoulders, stiff from having held the heavy gun aloft for so long. The instructor went through the instructions for the second time, standing between the two as he did.

"Wait for their motion. Aim to kill", he concluded with as he stepped out of the line of fire and began his pacing anew along the sideline. His heavy footsteps reminded Will of the tick of a clock, one massive enough to create the booming sound of those steel-toed boots.

Will watched her; she did not writhe under his gaze as his previous partner had. She held a relaxed stance as Will began to shout at her, "FBI, drop your weapon!" His heartbeat picked up pace; the thrumming so loud it must have been audible to the whole room. The eyes on him, their gazes crawling up him.

He pressed his fingers painfully hard into the grip of his gun, his trigger finger twitching with every breath she drew.

"Put your weapon down!" his voice echoed off the concrete walls. His heart kicked away in his rib cage like it was trying to break itself free.

"Drop your weapon!"

"FBI-" a muscle in her tricep jumped. Will pulled the trigger. Their shots went off in tandem.

A searing pain bloomed across his chest, unfurling along his sternum, spreading up his and up along his shoulders. He stumbled back, his footing less sure than he thought. Will bit down hard on the inside of his cheek, determined not to look like he couldn't handle the exercise.

"You hit?" the teacher inquired, crossing back between the two students, Will gave a terse nod as he holstered the gun with a satisfying click. He looked down where the rubber bullet lay at his feet. He poked at it with his shoe, and his teacher made the rounds.

His hand probed at the site of injury, the sharp pain had dulled and flattened out into a vague, undefined ache.

"Oliva?" The teacher called. So that was her name, Will mused, still more concerned with unfastening the velcro straps of his vest. She must have nodded because the teacher didn't ask Will to 'give it another go.' De-vested and nearly done fumbling with his helmet, Will nodded at her as she walked past. She appeared unfazed as she took his place, took on his stance.

He let himself fade back into the rest of the class, standing motionless against the wall. If Will got his wish, he would seep right through the walls. He let his head rest against the cold cinder blocks behind him and watched pair after pair stand opposite each other. He watched each work their way through the tense few seconds before their opponent made the shot.

Class let out a few minutes early, and Will reveled in the relative emptiness of the hallways. He made his way across campus, adjusting his jacket as he did, the spring still young and laced with a chill.

Back in his room, Will tossed off his coat and set to work. An essay he had been avoiding for a few days loomed, difficult to ignore now. He sat at his desk and opened his computer and pulled up the few articles Phyllis assigned. The papers covered the topic of social exclusion, a topic Will was a little shaky on thanks to his penchant for zoning out in class. He only made it as far as the bottom of the first page of the first article before he came across Hannibal's name. He felt put upon; how rude for Hannibal to work his way into Will's own room. He shook his head at the errant thought and pressed on.

Next paragraph, next page, Hannibal, Next page, Hannibal. New tab, new link, new paper, Hannibal, next page, Hannibal. New tab, Hannibal. New tab, new paper, next page, Hannibal. The number of times the man was referenced miffed Will for some reason he couldn't place.

Will gave up on digital research and instead turned to the precarious leaning tower of books set atop his printer. He pulled the first down, almost sure it had a chapter on social exclusion; he had at least skimmed it at the time his teacher had assigned it.

Unfortunately, before Will could even reach the title page he set the book down, Hannibal had written the forward.

Will scrubbed his hands roughly over his face. So what? What did it matter to him that Hannibal kept cropping up in his life? The man was prominent, it was bound to happen.

His phone buzzed a few times beside him, shuffling it's way to the very edge of his desk. Will snatched it up before it could tip off the side.

A few texts from Beverly reminding him they had lunch plans greeted him. Will glanced back at his ruinous desk, his shut laptop and the dozen or so books that needed skimming.

He considered just not completing the assignment. The image of Phyllis's face came to mind, riddled with little frown lines, downturned lips asking if he needed to talk, to call Alana, to give up on his work with Jack. He texted Beverly back a quick explanation and tossed his phone behind him, hoping it landed on the soft bed rather than the cruel tile.

Will waded through the sea that was the amount of content he was supposed to cover to write this essay.

At one point, by some mysterious trail of blue hyperlinks and related articles, Will ended up back on Lecter's website. When he realized he sighed and placed a hand on the uppermost corner of his laptop, ready to shut it again.

The truth of the matter was that Hannibal Lecter had extensive knowledge of the issue and a level of notoriety awarded to few. Every other book on the subject seemed to be some sort of abstraction of the man's work. Perhaps it would be necessary to go to the source.

With little difficulty, Will navigated to the original article. Evolutionary Origins of Social Exclusion. Will slumped down in his seat, preparing himself for a slog through overwritten flowery prose befitting of the man's ivory pens and Italian leather.

A few sentences in Will frowned, not a trace of purple prose cropped up. The words, of course, had a little flair, a little style, but the sentences read easily. Snappy, short, to the point. The frills Will had expected, Lecter had mercilessly trimmed from the work. To Will's chagrin, it was perhaps the most enjoyable academic paper he had read in quite a while.

Every page or two Lecter would nearly poke fun at his field, and just as you might begin to worry the Doctor reveled too much in his own levity, he delivered a sentence so profound and insightful that Will sat back in his chair a moment to digest it. The whole work reminded Will of a well-planned meal, the works Hannibal referenced functioning as a wine pairing.

He finished the article and immediately began work. The subject had never been more clear.

He completed three good pages in that one sitting before the sun had even slunk behind the horizon line.

A sense of pride, warm and glowing, rushed through him. Will managed a few more lines before he ran into a partially complex topic. He referred back to Hannibal's work and found

himself a little less than satisfied. The Doctor broached newer territory, territory Will felt he needed to speak the cartographer to explore.

And that is how Will found himself sat before his screen, a gushing email one click away from ending up in Hannibal Lecter's inbox.

Will came back to himself, read it over,

"Dr. Lecter,
My name's Will Graham, but I think I told you that or you knew when we met. I said a lot of things when we met actually. I'm the one who insulted you and then proceeded to nearly faint in front of you. I should apologize for that. Your work is insightful, but I think you knew that. Whenever I tell people that I've met you they ask what you're like, and I tell them your brillan-"

Will cringed, he noticed some of his vocal ticks had worked their way into his email. After having read Hannibal's writing, his insecurity about his own words only grew and evolved into something near parallelizing. Will dragged his cursor up along the whole message, highlighting it in blue and then swiftly wiping it out of existence.

This was stupid. He had a simple academic question. He didn't need to frame the email with their last meeting, and he surely didn't need to compliment the man. His ego clearly needed no bosting.

Will whiled away the next twenty minutes trying to craft a truly neutral message, all the while unsure as to why the Doctor's judgment of his tone mattered so much to him.

He settled on a simple introduction with his academic information, his age, and his questions. The message came out just this side of cold.

Will, still unhappy with his words yet unwilling to devote another twenty minutes to editing some warmth into his email, hit send and immediately slammed shut his laptop.

Having plowed through the second half of the recommended reading, Will heard his phone buzz behind him, loud against the linoleum floors. So he had missed the bed.

Will stood and stretched, sighing as he raised his arms overhead and alleviated the ache growing in his shoulders. He stooped to pick up his phone. One new email.

Will took a seat at the foot of his bed and immediately opened his phone, expecting to find a spam email or an update from one of his teachers.

Lecter had written back. Will glanced up at the time, two hours had hardly passed.

His finger hovered over the new email. In all likelihood, he had received an automated reply, something alerting him to Lecter's busy schedule, but how he and his team appreciated the email nonetheless.

"William," it began, and Will set his phone atop his thigh and started at the wall for a moment. Only two hours? Will rechecked the time, still in disbelief.

He picked up his phone, biting his lip he read.

"Dear William,
How nice of you to reach out. I admit I was expecting some sort of correspondence earlier. I would have reached out to you first if only I had means of contacting you. About your topic of study, I'm happy my writings were of some use to you. I also appreciate your questions, I enjoyed this glimpse into your mind. What other questions percolate there, I wonder. If you should find yourself free for a few hours this evening, I am available to meet."

Will's eyes halted on the word meet. All the nervousness he should have felt at their first meeting burst forward now. Will skimmed the next few lines and found an explanation for the sudden offer; Lecter had plans that involved some airfare in the coming week and was thoroughly booked the rest of his time before then.

The email, constructed with painstaking care more befitting a letter, was neatly tied together with some little proverb that encapsulated the Doctor's detest for digital communications.

Will peered over at his clock, he had the time. Lucky for Will, no one had made any pressing plans with him this Tuesday night.

The thought of texting Beverly about his excursion flickered through Will's mind but faded just as quickly.

Before he had even reached the concluding lines of the email, Will shoved his phone back into his pocket and threw his laptop and the few necessary books into his standard-issue backpack and started on his way to the door, only to get a look at himself in the full-length mirror.

With a groan, Will let his bag drop to the floor with a resounding thud and yanked open his dresser drawers, full enough with the FBI navy he had to pull the handles a few times before the wood gave way and offered up its contents.

Riffling through the unfolded shirts and sweaters, he found one that didn't scream the fact that he owned little else besides what the bureau had given him. A plain grey button-up, a pair of dark wash jeans that he hadn't damaged in some rigorous outing like he had the rest.

Halfway down the first flight of stairs, Will realized he had done nothing about his hair. Turning on his heel and bounding back up, he stopped before a windowpane in the hall and tried to flatten his mess of curls. Just too long to be reliably kept out of his face, just too short to tie back-- should he cut it now? Will physically shook off that thought and, in doing so, realized how fast his heart was beating. And for what? To drive an hour or so and sit across from a man and ask a few dry academic questions? Will righted himself.

This time, he descended the stairs slower and casually made his way across the empty parking lot. Will got into his car, checked the time, emailed Hannibal back.

The response came in minutes; Will jumped at the vibration in his pocket.

Will pulled up to the home and immediately wondered if he had made the right decision in coming. An imposing brick edifice loomed in the new dark, and the street lights had yet to flicker on and illuminate the space surrounding. Will traced the outline of the cream brick against the darkening sky that framed it.

He sat in the car for a moment, considering. Ultimately his curiosity won out.

Flattening his shirt with the palms of his hands, running them over his chest a few times before giving up, he got out of the car and pulled his book bag out behind him.

He walked up to the entrance, framed by a beautiful porch, and gave a light knock on the heavy wooden doors. No response. Will looked around, in search of a doorbell but was greeted by the continued expanse of smooth brick. Perhaps he had gotten the address wrong?

Just as Will turned to get a better look at the golden house numbers attached firmly to the lightly ivied walls, the creak of the door turned him back around.

Hannibal stood framed in golden light from within the home. Will looked up at him, glanced down at his shoes, black and seemingly melting into the lip of the floor.

"Hello, Will," He smiled at him appreciatively, as if Will's happening by delighted him more than anything he had seen in some time. He gave the impression of having just come from a world of wonderful, fanciful things and planned to return just as soon as you agreed to accompany him.

Will took note of the Doctor's sophisticated yet uncomplicated outfit. The deep red shirt flattered his shoulders, and despite its simplicity, it did little to soften his clean-cut frame. Black dress pants fit well and drew little attention to themselves. Will wondered if the Doctor had dressed down for the comfort of his decidedly less classy guest. Unsure if this effort on the part of the Doctor should flatter him or offend him, Will nodded at the man.

A moment of silence followed before Will realized Lecter probably expected a verbal greeting.

"Dr. Lecter."

"My patients call me Doctor. I prefer Hannibal. Come in"

Will gave a little grin, and at the Doctor's sweeping gestures to the inside of his home, Will stepped inside.

"Thank you, Hannibal."

Hannibal led him quickly through the home, not stopping to linger on any one of his precious possessions. He functioned within the space naturally, the finely tailored background suited his way of moving and made his gestures appear more natural. He never blended into the glittering backdrop his home provided, he commanded the space too well for that.

The home demanded an elegance of its inhabitants. Will noticed himself standing up a bit straighter.

He watched Hannibal walk down the hall and correct the placement of a vase with the smallest stroke of his hand as he passed by as if the object was one ought to be accustomed to touching causally. At the same time, Will didn't get the impression that Lecter lacked care for his possessions. If anything, he valued them highly. Only unlike others who, when confronted by masterworks, turned inwards to inspect their own faults, Hannibal turned inward and found his own equal perfection.

They came to the kitchen, an odd place for discussion Will mused to himself glancing around the room. As if his thoughts had broadcast themselves through the confines of his skull Hannibal said, "I have a few dishes to prepare tonight. I hope you can forgive my multitasking. Know that I appreciate your visit, though I do not appreciate it so much that I will allow my guest to go hungry."

"I've heard a lot about your dinner parties. They've been reported on." Will removed his glasses and fit them safely into his pocket.

Hannibal had already begun work, fitting himself with an apron and tying it behind his back with the effortless grace of a woman lacing up a dress.

Will watched silently as the Doctor rinsed a knife, washed his hands, and returned to the cut of meat lying prone on the steel countertop in a bed of waxed paper.

"I hope you can forgive me my inviting you here so suddenly." The Doctor spoke, eyes still on Will even as he began dicing the meat before him.

"It was hardly sudden. According to you, I've been dancing around this for a week."

"Is that the phrasing I used?" Hannibal wondered aloud as he carefully added the carved meat into a stainless steel bowl Will imagined he had filled with some marinade.

"I believe so."

"Forgive me that as well, then." Hannibal smiled as he spoke and Will observed the nearly pouty nature of his every expression. He hadn't noticed that in the lab.

"Can I help you with anything?" Will questioned, the standing and watching growing uncomfortable.

Hannibal paused his ministrations, knife poised just above a pepper, the blade just biting into the tight skin of the vegetable.

"What experience do you have in the kitchen?" Despite what answer Will gave, it was clear that Hannibal would allow him to help, having already crossed the expansive kitchen to grab another apron off of a hook for Will.

"I cooked for myself growing up."

"Absent parent?"

"Absent mother, busy father." Will shrugged, taking a few steps across the tiled floor to meet Hannibal halfway.

"Did you often prepare meat?"

"Often burned it."

"A cardinal sin in my kitchen." Hannibal tutted and smiled, the corners of his eye creasing as he did so.

Holding out the apron in the space between them, Hannibal allowed it to hang there until Will reached out and grabbed it for himself. The surprisingly soft fabric in hand, Will set to work trying to tie it. Hannibal watched his attempts with a look of faint amusement.

"What?"

"This is a front tie apron." Hannibal took a step forward and presented his hands as if offering them to some skittish animal, telegraphing his intent, asking permission to touch.

"Allow me,"

Will nodded, body going stiff in apprehension. Lecter touched a hand to his shoulder as if testing Will wouldn't bite.

With careful hands, he took hold of what Will had thought were the simple tie-behind strips of fabric over his shoulder, forming straps. He then crossed them behind Will's back, creating the 'x' Will had observed framing Hannibal's own back. To do so, the man had to get quite close.

"This is familiar," Will muttered, looking aggressively to the side as the man leaned further into his personal space.

"No dead bodies this time."

Hannibal's hands made contact with his back sparingly, and when they did, they didn't linger. Will managed not to jump at the touch, warm through the fabric of his shirt. He smelled of the rich mahogany that cropped up in every room of the man's house, of suede or leather, and the smoke from whatever divine thing he currently prepared. An agreeable smell. When Hannibal tilted his head to get a better look over Will's shoulder and exposed his neck, Will caught another whiff of it.

Hannibal pulled Will closer--if possible--as he circled the strands of fabric through two gold rings in the back, creating another 'x' against the small of Will's back that mirrored a corset's whorling lacing.

"It is Vanille Fatale if you were wondering," Hannibal muttered as he finished with the tying and made a quick bow in the front of the apron. Will looked down at Hannibal's hands as they retreated, unsure exactly how to react to having been called out.

"Something with cursive gold letters on the bottle?" he tried, stepping well out of reach of Hannibal.

"They are in print if you must know," Hannibal grinned and slipped back behind the counter and continued his work as if nothing had happened a very safe distance from him. Will let out a breath he didn't realize he was holding.

"Come here, Will," He motioned for Will to approach with his free hand.

Will fiddled with the intricate lacing of the apron as he walked, knot, and crisscrossed ties tight against his skin; he felt bound.

"What's with the rarefied aprons?" he questioned as Hannibal handed him a knife.

"I confess a love of the unorthodox. Cut those for me." Hannibal motioned Will over to the wooden chopping block upon which a mountain of shallots towered precariously beside a massive silver bowl glinting under the almost clinical light of the kitchen.

The two worked in silence for a moment, Will trying to work up the courage to segway into his list of questions.

"About your work,"

"About my work?" Hannibal parroted as he crossed to the fridge and set a few bowls within.

"I enjoyed the paper, it was uh enlightening."

Hannibal had his back to him, but Will could hear his smile in his voice, "Thank you. I find writing to be a good way to organize one's thoughts. Do you write, Will?"

"My thoughts tend to resist organization."

"Exactly why you should write. A little organization does well for everyone."

Will chuckled, "Trust me, Doctor, I've tried all sorts of things. Writing isn't going to my salvation."

Will fell into a comfortable rhythm with the knife and found himself able to risk the occasional glance away from his work to gauge the responses of the man across from him.

"Do you feel in need of saving?"

Will paused mid-cut and resumed again, only a momentary lapse, but enough that Will knew Hannibal must have seen.

"No."

"I imagine you feel like you're drowning. Images compile themselves into seas of misfortune during your days for you to wade through at night."

"Trust me. The water's fine."

"Associations come quickly." Hannibal mused.

"I have an active imagination. It comes with the territory."

"You are also avoidant."

"As stated prior." Will grimaced as he looked down at his brutalized shallot, the cuts were woefully uneven. The room fell silent again.

"Social exclusion," Will began, trying to lead the conversation away from his disorganized psych and back to the safer topic of his schoolwork, "Is normally thought of as one lone person, cast out from the pack if you will, totally separate and disdainful."

"A common misconception." Hannibal mused, starting up with his own rhythmic chopping, the blade parting meat and landing with a satisfying 'shick' against the wooden cutting board.

"Often, the marginalized man will often find himself in the crossfires between warring cultures. The individual doesn't always find himself a soldier in this war. Occasionally there is a melting, an internal ceasefire within the mind of our civilian, but the dissonance caused by his internal peace and the continuation of aggression outside his control is disorientating." All the while, Hannibal continued his work on the cutting board, yet somehow Will still felt more than the Doctor's undivided attention. It unnerved him.

"And you believe that is more painful?" Will paused his own ministrations, to glance at Hannibal, "That it's the dissonance that is the root cause of their pain?"

"A singular and blind attachment, no matter how destructive, is easier to maintain than a complex understanding of the twoness of one's mind. They themselves often mistake it for a hatred of one of the parties."

"Better to pick a side, then."

"Less painful." Hannibal corrected as he finished with the last cut of meat. He waved Will over once more and passed him a bowl and a carton of eggs.

"Separate the whites out," he instructed, "Like so," he demonstrated, and Will couldn't help but roll his eyes.

"Your work-life seeps into your home too?" Will quips, taking over. Cracking each egg with a single blunt blow and then watching as the thin clear contents hung suspended between the shell and bowl for a moment, bitter at having to relinquish its insides.

"I would apologize for my pedagogical tone, but if I do, I set a precedent. I must use apologies sparingly. I don't want to bore you."

"What are you making?" Will wondered aloud, eyes still trained on the yokes he passed back and forth between the jagged edges of the shells.

"We are making Consommé. It is deceptively simple-looking once complete, it is the creation of the dish that interests me more."

They continued in comfortable bouts of silence and relaxed conversation about Lecter's studies. Despite the imposing home and the daunting man who dwelled within, Will felt strangely comfortable working beside him.

"Do you often think of our first meeting?"

Will, halfway through separating the eggs, paused to look over at Hannibal, "Of you?"

"Of the body,"

"It has yet to wash up on the shore of that sea you mentioned," Will mutters, continuing with the preparation.

"I really, I'm alright."

Hannibal had finished with his prep for the evening and whisked away all the reminisce of his culinary work with surprising efficiency. Only to lead Will to the dining room, equally impressive with it's stately color plate and wall of live herbs and offer him a quick dessert for the troubling of having driven so far.

"I'm afraid when it comes to my cooking, I won't take no for an answer," Hannibal smirked as he deposited a little plate before Will.

"Stubborn," Will muttered, a continuation of their very first conversation.

"I'm afraid we are similar in that way."

"I rarely have someone over I do not intend to dine with."

Will sat opposite the mantle atop which stood two curving horns of some kind framing one of the more risque renditions of Leda and the swan Will had seen. He flicked his eyes away, affording Leda the privacy Zeus had not.

Hannibal followed WIll's gaze as he sat across from him, "A gift from a friend."

"She shared your taste for the unorthodox then?" Will took hold of the thin spoon and prodded the dish. Chocolate Marrow Cake, Hannibal had described it.

"She too was an aesthete."

"Was?"

Hannibal smiled fondly, "She left for Europe some time ago, I haven't heard from her since. She was a very kind girl with a good heart." Hannibal glanced down at his plate, "almost as sweet as her."

Will took a bite of the silky dessert presented to him and smiled, it was sweet.

Chapter End Notes

Hello All!

Forgive me for any mistakes, I currently have no beta and had quite a time crunch this week! While I'm on the topic, if you'd like to beta for me, my Tumblr is somethingmissingthings.

As always, if you enjoyed, I'd love to hear your thoughts! (and if you didn't enjoy, let me know as well and I'll do what I can!)

Chapter 5

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The car was always a good place to think. The vast black expanse of pavement made a perfect canvas across which Will could lay his thoughts. The swaths of white light spilling across the road from overhead lights blurred with the red and yellow dots of tail lights that floated disembodied somewhere in front of Will, speeding into the coming night.

Will had stayed much longer than he intended. Over their deserts, their conversation had drifted from Will's topic of study to Hannibal's unceasing curiosity, to finally land somewhere between the two issues that Will found agreeable enough. When Will finished with dessert and made to leave, Hannibal offered him a glass of wine.

"I shouldn't"

"I wouldn't have you refuse me," Hannibal handed over the chilled, thin fluke, contents glistening in the soft light of the dining room. He gave one of his miniature impromptu dissertations on the wine, Will had forgotten most of what the man said, but remembered the sparkling joy with which he explained.

They whittled at another half hour or so before Will remembered the time. He had his answers, both Will and doctor knew their official reason for the meeting had been well played out at least a half-hour ago.

Lecter escorted Will out and waited in the pool of light on his porch until Will had pulled out of the driveway.

The harsh sound of a blaring horn pulled Will out of his reveries. He swerved, just narrowly missing the bumper of the car ahead of him. Thankfully, Will extricated himself from the flow of traffic with relative ease and made it back to the academy unscathed.

Parking the car, Will gazed out the windshield across the greyish ocean of concrete.

This whole thing had been strange. People had probably made it a life's goal to work besides Hannibal Lecter in the kitchen or in the lab, toiled tirelessly for the chance to express their admiration for him, and Will had just sort of fallen into it. More than that, he had attempted to avoid the gravitational pull Lecter seemed to exert upon all those who knew him.

Will grimaced, a late-night visit and preparing meals together certainly qualified as "keeping company," Alana would have something to say about that.

But that was odd too, Will could hardly fathom a man of Hannibal's status deigning to show any sort of interest in a person like himself. Right now, perhaps he had sparked a little flame of curiosity within the doctor, but Will was certain that he'd manage to fuck up in some extraordinary way as he always did and snuff out the fire just as quickly.

Will leaned back in his seat, the headrest painfully firm behind his head. Surely he hadn't overstayed his welcome, Hannibal had offered him something to drink hadn't he? Perhaps Hannibal felt he had to? Hannibal was a man of culture and adhered to strict codes of conduct, he couldn't exactly ask Will to leave… could he? But Will hadn't invited himself over. Or did it seem that way?

Will rummaged through his pocket and pulled out his phone and opened his email and reread it. The hazy blue light emanating from his phone screen illuminated his features; furrowed brows, downturned lips.

He was unsure how he came across in his email. The doctor's response had been kind enough, but Will couldn't be sure he wasn't misunderstanding something.

And even if he had overstayed his welcome, it wasn't as if Will was in the habit of prioritizing the comfort of others. Will's worries folded in on themselves, tearing at each other, a deafening cacophony building within his skull.

He slid out of the car, eyes still glued to his phone, rereading the few emails they exchanged and nearly hit his head on his way out. He hardly heard if the door closed behind him, but he couldn't be bothered to check.
Will made his way across the parking lot and into the dorm where pajama-clad Beverly immediately accosted him the second he turned into the stairwell.

"Where were you," she looked him over and raised an amused eyebrow at Will's attempt at classy dress, "who are you all dressed up for?"

"You waited up for me?" Will, incredulous, crossed his arms. Beverly eyed that, a classic sign of withheld information. Conscious of his body and Beverly's keen eyes, Will dropped them back to his side. She noticed that too.

"You never go anywhere, I'm curious" She shrugged.

Will turned away, "I go places." Will hoped against all hope that someone would walk down the stairs and interrupt their conversation, no such savior came.

Beverly cut in front of him, blocking his route of escape "Where?"

"Out."

"Out? Where's out?"

Will tried to push past her, pocketing his phone as he did. She trailed him up the stairs, his every step echoed by her own.

"It's not your job to keep track of me. You're not responsible for me," and even though Will had his back to her, he could feel the air sour between them. He should have just lied, said he'd gone to a bar. Vagueness always tended to draw Katz in.

"You're right, I'm not. I'm your friend. And I really was just asking." her footsteps halted behind him, the sound of his own steps sounding particularly lonely for her absence. Will

turned back to Katz, a few steps ahead of her now.

"You're acting weird."

Will raised an eyebrow.

"Okay, More so than usual."

Will sat down on the steps and leaned his shoulder against the railing beside him, his shoulder slotting between the rungs.

"I was at Dr. Lecters."

"Hannibal Lecter?" She asked through the grin taking hold of her features, her mood doing a clean 180. Hands on her hips, she inspected Will again, found new meaning in his button-up shirt.

"Stop it."

"Stop what?"

"That" Will crossed his arms once again, suddenly self-conscious of his outfit.

Beverly walked up the next few steps and sat beside Will and nudged him with her shoulder, "So?"

"So what?"

She leaned forward and tried to catch his eye, Will looked around, anywhere but at her--and wasn't that just the neatest spot on the wall just across from them-

"What happened?"

"I emailed him. He asked me over."

Beverly propped her head up in a cupped hand, elbow against her knees. The lights in the stairwell filled the ensuing silence with a faint hum, the pitch wavering every now and again.

"What'd his house look like? A big stuffy mansion?"

"It's late, Beverly," Will sighed, standing up and starting down the hall towards his room.

"Another question, why were you there so late?"

"We had drinks," Will shrugged as he continued in a beeline toward his room.

"You had drinks?" Beverly exclaimed. Will shushed her, the thin walls doing little to protect sleeping agents from her outbursts.

By then, Will had made it to his room and slipped inside, leaving Beverly alone in the dim hallway.

The sound of Will's phone ringing shredded the fragile silence of his dorm room. The sun had yet to creep into the room from the single window above Will' 's bed as it did every morning.

Will rolled over and his thin mattress groaned at the abuse of his shoulder digging into the springs below. His phone vibrated against his nightstand, jumping against the yellowish wood and kicking up a racket.

Will reached for it half-blind in the dark, vision blurry for lack of glasses or contacts. His hand made contact with the smooth edges, only to knock it completely off the nightstand.

Will pulled himself out of bed and winced at the pickling chill of the night air against his now un-blanked body.

On hands and knees on the chilled linoleum, Will retrieved his phone from under the bed and sat back with his head resting against the side of his insubstantial mattress. He kicked a book out of the way to fully extend his legs.

A missed call from Jack. Will groaned; it was far too early. He called back.

"Will."

"Good morning to you too, Jack," Will muttered as he pulled himself off the floor, and with his phone safely trapped between his shoulder and ear, he began dressing.

"Little good about it,"

Jack gave an address and the briefest of rundowns as Will hopped around the room, pulling up a pair of jeans.

A murder of a young girl, found a few miles out of Baltimore, could possibly open up a long-closed case. Jack hung up soon after those sparse details, neither man very interested in pleasantries at 4 am.

Dressed, Will slunk down the hallways, careful not to wake anyone as he left the building and crossed the parking lot, the damp ground reflecting the street lights.

Will opened the door. It gave way too easily; internally, Will began a stream of quiet, "shit, shit, shit" 's. He got in, praying the vehicle would start; he hadn't shut the door all the way in his distracted state. He turned the key. The car remained silent. Will tried again, frown firmly plastered on his face; nothing but a faint clicking sound.

Stepping back out of the car, he looked around. Too early to ask Katz to drive, unable to get a cab to drive him to a crime scene, Will leaned his back against his silent car and gazed up at the sky, stars fading into nothingness with the coming of morning.

He retrieved his phone once more, sighing as he opened it and dialed Jack's number.

"Hey."

"Will?" the faint rumble of Jack's car audible in the background over the phone did little to obscure his voice over the line.

"My car won't start, I uh left the lights on overnight."

"And you need what from me?"

Will closed his eyes and brought a hand up to his face, scratching the bridge of his nose absentmindedly.

"Could you, uh, pick me up? On your way there. You pass the academy, right?"

Jack didn't answer yes so much as he hummed his vague agreement.

"I'll be there in twenty-"

Will hung up.

He moved to sit on the hood of his car and gaze across the parking lot, the eerie silence demanding observation.

Jack arrived and Will crossed the few feet to Jack's car, his shoes making wet sounds as he walked. He slid into the passenger's seat, already steeling himself for the awkwardness of this drive.

"What had you so distracted last night."

Will glanced up from his lap, "Sorry?"

"You said you left the lights on."

Will crossed his arms and leaned into the hard and unforgiving door, "I had a lot on my mind."

"You're about to have a whole lot more," Jack intoned, eyes still fixed on the road ahead.

Will scrubbed at his eyes beneath his glasses, pushing the frames up his forehead for a moment.

"What do you know about Eddie Byrd?"

Will shrugged before remembering Jack wasn't looking his way.

"He uh, had a spree when I was maybe 17? It wasn't far from here. There was always something medical about his murders?"

Jack gave a firm nod, "He preserved his victims."

"With silicone?" Will wondered aloud in a low murmur.

Jack did turn to look at him then, Will risked a glance back, "You remember more than I would have at 17."

"I think I worked on one of his victims," At Jack's look of confusion, Will explained, eyes firmly fixed on the passing scenery all the while.

"That unclaimed body could have opened the case again, motion didn't pass, Byrd had been inactive too long, and we didn't have the pleading parents as motive. Most of his past victim's next of kin are in nursing homes now. A bit too old to rally. But this one? She could be the key to reopening it."

Will turned to look past Jack and through his window at the twin stream of cars, "Lucky her."

Jack reached across the dashboard and turned on the radio. The music started up, and Will closed his eyes, ready to give himself a few more minutes of oblivion before they arrived at the crime scene.

"How's school."

"You don't have to, you know."

Jack glanced over at Will, curled in on himself in ratty jeans and academy hoodie, "To what?"

"Make friends with me. We don't have to talk. I'm your employee."

Jack drummed his fingers against the steering wheel, "I like to know who I'm working with."

"People tend to like me less once they get to know me. I have uh found it more… advantageous to keep quiet." Will shifted, the door handle digging into his arm.
Jack opened and closed his mouth, looking for something to say, the tinny music now audible in the lull of their conversation.

"My wife likes you."

"She has pity for me."

The sun has just peered beyond the horizon line when Will and Jack arrive, Will anticipating his release from the awkward silence of Jack's company and his horrible taste in music.

Will got out and examined the scene before him. They had stopped in the middle of nowhere, a little ditch beside the road. Will looked around once more; at the dark outline of trees, the shifting bodies of other agents; the dry grass reached out to the oblivion above, splitting at odd angles; and a body, perfectly ungored. Will approached the body through the yellowed brush and pasted the few agents that loitered around it.

"Will?" Jack called from somewhere behind Will, he turned from his course to face the man calling him. And there was Doctor Lecter.

Will blinked, he was still there. Odd.

Will approached cautiously, hands firmly in pockets.

"Will, I want you to meet Doctor Lecter."

Will stood before the two now, at least 95% sure this conversation was really taking place.

"Hello," Hannibal grinned, eyeing Will. His gaze oscillated between Will's eyes, trying to figure out how he would like him to proceed.

Jack glanced between the two men, unsure of what had passed between them.

"Nice to meet you, Will," Lecter held out a hand, holding Will's gaze. He blinked up at the man before him and took an impersonal step back, his boots sinking into the muddy ground.

"Hannibal Lecter knew Byrd. You two went to the same school, isn't that right?" Jack turned, deferring to the doctor.

Will turned on his heel and headed back towards the body to the tune of Jack's unamused calls of, "Will? Will?"

The body lay gently upon the ground. The rain misted her, and the dew droplets against her blue-tinged skin glistened in the early morning light. The flaxen grasses cradled her unabused body as if she had just fallen asleep here and dreamt on. Her limbs rested comfortably against her stomach, having already passed the 84-hour mark of rigor mortis. Will kneeled down on the soft dirt and peered down at her. 19? Maybe 20?

From the rustles of the grass behind him, Will knew Jack approached, Hannibal in toe. Jack rustled some papers, and Will heard Lecter offer to hold a few in his lilting accented voice.

"Do we have a name?" Will questioned, rounding the body and swatting at gnats as he did.

"Julia Harris," Jack began, about to launch into a monologue about what they had on her.

"Her age?" Will cut him off, impatient to get to the details he deemed most necessary.

"We don't know,"

Will frowned, "How'd you get a name with no age?"

Jack motioned toward the body with his chin, Will knelt once again and looked her over.

A red tag, stiff fabric, clipped through her ear, named her in carefully embroidered letters. Will saw the point of the needle diving in and out of the material, the precisely cut string being tied off, a purposeful hand making the sole puncture through which to thread the tag. It lacked the grandiosity of the sort of murders Jack usually called Will in for. Perhaps it was the esoteric simplicity of this murder that confounded Jack.

"-The lack of visible injury, her good health, where she was left, we won't know about the silicone until we run toxicology-" Will tuned back in, he hadn't been aware Jack was

speaking.

"It's not Byrd," Will muttered, pulling himself off the ground and frowning at his now mud-caked knees.

Turning from the body, Will began his trek back up to Jack's car, ready to wait the hour or so Jack would need to finish up this scene.

"Will," Jack uttered in a rising crescendo.

"Why isn't it him?" Jack demanded stalking up behind him, grasses rustling with his approach. Will bristled at the man's voice.

"The tag. The tag in the ear is uh, how they keep track of pigs. Clip them on the ears to distinguish them from the rest. Animals are born in indistinguishable litters, they aren't special. Eddie Byrd liked the rare ones. He saw something exceptional in every one of his victims." Will turned from his own thoughts to face Jack, "Did she have siblings?"

"We don't know that yet."

"She'll have siblings. A twin even. By nature, she is, unspecial," Will muttered, looking past jack and up the empty road behind the imposing outline of his frame.

"Byrd dumped a body not even a mile down the road. Young kid laid out just like this. We've found his sleeping beauties here before."

"Exactly, It's too perfect. This is a copycat."

"What other killer do you know of that leaves a body like this. She died without a single bruise, she stayed that way."

An indigent sort of flush worked it's way up Will's neck, the chill of the morning hardly cooling his face, "Julia's killer though nothing of her. She was a pig to him. Livestock. Byrd worships his victims, he thinks he's saving them. This?" Will gesture wildly at the body resting peacefully beside them, unaware of the rising tensions and bickering. "This isn't worship, this is… this is an artful degradation."

"You're telling me Byrd loves his victims? We should be looking for love?"

Will shoved his glasses back into place, eyes darting around the ground, catching on Doctor Lecter's shoes--so he had wandered closer during the argument, drawn to the conflict.

"He doesn't love them, not like that. He… he has a respect for them. He wants to preserve them, keep them safe. If that's love, then sure, he loves them. This victim's killer thought she was an animal."

"So he what, admires Byrd?"

Will shook his head, curls fell into his face, which he shoved aside with a harsh hand, "No. Byrd is below him. He wants us to know that."

"Do you want to look first?" Jack asked, his voice strained in his annoyance.

"No." Will began his stalking back towards the line of cars, damp and glistening as the body.

"Will," Jack shouts, loud enough to halt the proceedings of the other officers.

Will whipped around and marched his way back to Jack, "There's no point in me looking. I've seen enough. I gave you my answer. It's not him. I'm a student, you're the head of the behavioral science department. If you don't like my answers and you can't come up with your own, I'm sure you can just pull another of your wife's students. Desperate twenty-somethings are easy to come by these days."

"What did you just say to me?" Jack intoned, low and threatening, contempt brimming, bubbling up, like water in an overfull glass testing the limits of surface tension.

"Nothing."

"That's right." It was Jack's turn to stalk away. Apparently, his only function at this scene was to tote Will along and keep a firm fist on his leash. Without so much as another word to any of the other agents, Jack got into his car, slammed the door shut, and drove away, kicking up gravel in a grayish spray as he drove off.

Will stood, aimless and fuming surrounded by the dull shuffling of footsteps and camera lens clicks and awkward mutterings of passing agents, no doubt talking about him. Look at what the schoolboy's done now, look at how spectacularly he fucked this scene up.

"Looks like Uncle Jack didn't take kindly to your assessment." Hannibal turned over his shoulder, tracking Jack's black car as the billowing fog swallowed it whole and obscured it.

Will removed his gasses and wiped at them haphazardly with the hem of his shirt.

"He likes me as a confirmation tool. This happens when we have a difference of professional opinion."

"Do you disagree often?"

Will gave a lopsided grin at this, "I've been left behind at a few rainy crime scenes before if that's what you're asking."

Hannibal tilted his head as if considering something, "Does Jack abandon you often?"

Will gave a short bark of a laugh, crossing his arms tightly against his chest, "Abandonment requires a sort of wistful hope. Jack fails to... inspire that in me."

"When Jack asked you to look, was it pride or fear that made you refuse him?"

"Pride. I've seen a lot worse than this."

Hannibal took a few steps closer to Will to stand at his side rather than across from him. They both looked out over the field before them, sunlight just beginning to dapple grounds and

burn through the fog.

"Are you not curious about what you might find?"

"No, but it seems like you are, Doctor."

"Would you humor me?" Hannibal asked, turning to look at Will.

A few medical examiners were in the process of lifting the body onto a gurney, "My mind's not for rent."

"Jack is a reckless tenant," Hannibal concluded.

Will shoved his hands in his pockets and trailed the path of the workers with his eyes, "He has a habit of leaving the light on when he leaves. Never calls anyone about leaky faucets or eh burst light bulbs. He leaves the glass on the floor."

"A dangerous walk through the halls of your mind then."

Will glanced down, "I wouldn't recommend bare feet, no."

"How often do you bloody yourself?"

They had the girl fully zipped inside the black body bag before the sun fully rose, Will watched her slip behind the closing doors of the coroner's van. They slammed shut, and the echo of metal on metal was all that remained of her. The vehicle faded away.

"Nightly," Will muttered.

Hannibal glanced around at the shifting mass of FBI personnel coming and going, and EMTs finally packing up, "Any particular friends here?"

Will gave a proper laugh at that, the sort that bubbles up in the chest and spills out without permission.

"No, I am generally disliked."

The doctor looked him over with amusement rather than the pity a comment like that would typically engender.

"How do you plan on getting home?"

Will squinted and looked up the road in the direction he had come, "Walk a bit, call a cab." He shrugged, looking back at the doctor.

"I'll drive you."

Will fought to keep his expression neutral, "I'm alright. I've figured this out before."

"I'm beginning to suspect you're trying to avoid me."

Chapter End Notes

Time has been escaping me! Sorry, this chapter is a bit shorter than last, but school has been quite hectic recently!

If you enjoyed let me know! I love hearing from readers, especially in these turbulent times. Stay safe, be healthy!

Chapter 6

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

"I'm not avoiding you," Will muttered, already judging how long it would take him to walk maybe a mile or so up the road before calling a cab. He imagined just waiting here for an hour or so, then calling Beverly to get him. She'd done it before.

Hannibal watched a few more agents hop in cars and slam doors shut before speeding off.

"If you aren't avoiding me, you have no reason to refuse."

Will dug the toe of his boot into the soft mud underfoot, "I fear I'm taking advantage of your hospitality." He lifted his boot again, conscious of his fidgeting.

"I enjoy the company."

Will shrugged, "I doubt you suffer from lack of choice. There are better options…" he trailed off.

"One finds good company in the most unlikely situations." The doctor gestured to his car once more.

"It's out of your way," Will tried.

"I enjoy long car rides." Lecter countered easily. He began the walk towards his car without so much as a glance back at Will, as if he was so sure that Will would follow him he did need to waste the energy required to check. As if it were the most natural thing in the world for Will to follow in his wake.

Lecter opened the door for Will, which Will rolled his eyes at much to Lecter's amusement. Will's door shut, The doctor got into the driver's seat and they drove away from the scene, leaving the blood-soaked dirt and broken stalks of reeds behind.

The crime scene out of sight, the sounds of sirens and paper shuffling bodies totally out of earshot, the car fell silent. Not into the sort of silence that demands to be broken, but rather the quiet between claps of thunder, comfortable for their ephemerality.

Will curled into the door, careful not to press his cheek against the window and smudge the glass.

"Thanks," Will muttered watching the wet and blurring scenery glide past out the window. Streaks of greens and greys, trees, and asphalt, melding beyond the glass.

"I wouldn't have you wandering this area alone."

Will made a sound of disbelief, "You think I'd be in danger?"

“That girl was only a year or two younger than you.”

Will crossed his arms, “I’m not exactly Byrd’s type or the copycats.”

“Why is that?” Hannibal wondered aloud.

“I drink. So I’m less the picture of perfect health Byrd would have me be. But the copy cat would find me too interesting to kill, I think. At least, not like that.”

Will turned his face away at the sudden attention Hannibal devoted to him; back to hazy, blurring reality and rain-streaked glass.

Hannibal viewed people the way Will surveyed a crime scene. He picked at the details, made leaps, but never anything careful examination of the evidence wouldn’t support. At that moment Will hated being looked at more than he hated looking.

“Criminals often return to the scene of the crime.” Hannibal offered as he took a turn, the straightaway finally leading back to familiar highways.

“What,” Will sat up a bit in his seat, the conversation and the moment of scrutiny rousing him a bit, “You think I’m safer with you? I don’t know you. I should have refused.”

Hannibal glanced over at him, “Why’s that.”

“Shouldn’t get into cars with strange men. For all I know, you're planning my murder right now, stranger”

Hannibal gave a low laugh, a smile flitting over his features, “I’d hardly consider us strangers. We cooked together,”

Will sighed, remembering he would have to bring this up too at his next session with Alana.

“Even more reason I should have stayed. Most murders are committed by someone close to the victim.”

“Are we close?”

And with that, Will curled right back in on himself, “Let’s keep it professional.”

“Is it a wasted effort to invite you to breakfast then?”

“Were you planning on inviting me? Last time I was with you, you were preparing days in advance for a dinner.”

“Luckily, I’ve had dough chilling all morning.”

Will rolled his eyes at that. Adjusted his glasses, he felt them slip and adjusted them once more, “I don’t see why you're so keen on my company.”

“I find you interesting.”

“Does professionalism preclude your acting as mu sous-chef again?” Hannibal asked from across the room, just now sliding the carefully cut, folded, and scored pastries into the oven.

He stood and dusted off his hands in a quick clapping motion, sending little plums of flour up and flying. In his deep red shirt and half-apron, he looked the picture of cultivation. Hannibal appeared at all times like he was prepping for a photo shoot that was due to happen the next time he turned the corner.

“If I have to wear the apron again it does.” Will stood, elbows braced on one of the counters watching Hannibal work. He was the picture of civility and confidence. He flexed his foot, popping the heel of his shoe on and off over his wet socks.

“Don’t you have classes this morning?”

“You invited me, I didn’t want to be rude.”

Hannibal had his back to Will but he could hear a smile in the man’s voice, “I’ll have to apologize to the academy for keeping you so long, then.”

“Don’t worry, they don’t miss me.”

Hannibal returned to the counter Will rested against now, egg carton in hand, “What makes you say that, Will?”

“I’m disruptive.”

“How so?” Hannibal set to work boiling the eggs. Will watched as Lecter hopped from one task to another as if he considered managing the multiple dishes he had going a sort of dance. The eggs and pastries set to cook, Hannibal was now to Will’s right finely chopping a number of leafy greens and nuts.

Will tilted his head as he thought, hair falling into his eyes, he tucked the strand back behind his ear before he spoke again, “I’m quiet, but I stick out, being an early admit. There are a lot of people at the academy who resent that.”

“Resentful that the rules were bent for you?”

“That they weren’t bent for them,” Will corrects.

“I find it commendable.”

“Of course you would,” Will utters under his breath.

Hannibal served orange juice from a glass pitcher into filament flukes. He dished Will’s plate with a hand on the younger man’s shoulder. Given the situation, the touch felt almost natural and failed to shock Will.

Will appraised his plate; now forced to admit Lecter's artistry in all things. Before him sat sausage, freshly made pastry, a slice of quiche, egg garnished with hazelnuts, chanterelles, green garlic, and blackberries, and a little side dish of strawberries and a finger bowl of handmade whipped cream.

Hannibal took his own seat across from Will and spent a short moment fussing with the napkin, Will smirked at that.

"I have been meaning to make up for the banality of our first meal."

Will bit his lip trying to school his smile, "Uh, not many people would call bone marrow cake banal" Will drew out the last word, half-teasing the man for his manner of speech.

"So, why exactly did Jack drag you along to that scene?" Will transitioned into before the man across from him could get in another line about the lack of fanfare surrounding their first meal.

Hannibal grinned, "Jack meant to tell you there, but you had other things to attend."

"Well, I'm curious now."

Hannibal cut into his own cardamom bun--which Will had been treating as finger food--and with a look of self-satisfaction ingested the sweet bread.

"I knew him when I was a boy. During my years in Paris, we were quite close. Attended the same schools. He'd always had a fascination with the medicinal, but then, so did I."

"Nothing wrong with that," Will hastily wiped his hands on his napkin and followed suit with the fork as he finished the last of the perfumed pastry, "Did you consult when Byrd went on his first spree,"

Hannibal raised the sparkling glass to his lips before answering, "That was 5 years ago? Yes, I did."

"What was that like?" Will prodded at the egg.

"He was my friend. It was difficult." Hannibal glanced down as if momentarily distressed by some memory of his involvement. Somehow, Will doubted the sincerity of that demure downcast glance. It felt constructed.

"Were you involved?" he questioned, looking up once more, "I can't imagine how we didn't meet earlier."

"I was 17" Will sipped his own drink, half afraid he would snap the fine stem.

"Time slips by, doesn't it?" Hannibal questioned, deciding not to push the matter further.

Will shrugged and indulged once again in the meal set out before him.

“That boy we worked on,” Will piped up again, eyes fixed on the pooling yoke slowly spreading across the white expanse of his plate.

“He was one of Byrd's, yes.” Hannibal pursed his lips as he tilted his head trying to catch Will’s eye.

Will grimaced, “that didn’t bother you?”

Hannibal shook his head, fork and knife working as he did, “the dead rarely shock me, necessary in my field. I haven't seen Byrd in years. I see little to be uncomfortable about.”

Will shifted, the smooth back and cushioned seat of his chair growing uncomfortable.

“What were you like at 17,” Hannibal began cutting into the sausage, “Tell me, could you think about him then as you can now? I imagine such powers of perception were shocking in someone so young.”

“Don’t worry, I shock people just as much now.”

“To see such a thing at such a young age. Did it distress you then?”

Will looked back up at the man in front of him, “You trying to figure out if Jack made me this way? I’ve always been like this.”

“I'm sure Jack has been a positive influence on your life if that’s how you feel.” and before Will could get a word in to explain he certainly didn’t feel that way, Hannibal continued, “What did your parents think of your gift?”

Will bristled. He had been interrogated by any number of doctor sorts about his childhood. They all tended to seize upon the fact he had never known his mother. Plenty of people didn’t know their mothers and didn’t end up like Will. Luck of the draw, he guessed.

“You're defensive.” Hannibal ascertained, brilliantly.

“You're invasive.” Will set down his utensils.

“Hard not to be, you present a fascinating puzzle, Will.” Hannibal glanced down at Will’s unfinished plate and abandoned fork.

“Are you not hungry?”

Will shrugged and started inventorying the assortment of plants hung on the wall behind Hannibal’s head.

“I tend to skip breakfast.”

“Best not to deny one’s self.”

A wry grin flickered over Will’s face at the Doctor’s comment, “It’s not phycological. I’m busy. I can’t find the time most mornings.”

“And on the weekends?”

“Why do you care so much about my eating habits, Dr. Lecter?”

“I want you to eat well.”

Will raised his eyebrows at the man, prompting him to continue, “I care about you.”

Will openly scoffed at that, averting his gaze as he did, “You don’t know me.”

“I’d like too. Besides, it seems like you and I will be involved with this case for some time. God forbid we carry on cordially.”

Will took his napkin off his lap, and stood, dusting off his jeans “I don’t play nice with others.”

Hannibal mirrored Will, standing and collecting his own plate as he did. He carried it like a waiter might, balanced on a jacket-clad forearm.

“You make for good company,”

Will searched his features, looking for some trace of scorn, some evidence of the falsity of Lecter’s statement, “Is that what we’re doing? Keeping company?”

“I have you at my table for the second time this week, Will.”

Will glanced down, looking for something to occupy his hands with. He made to clean up his own dishes, but Hannibal explained he would prefer Will let him clean up, “You are my guest,” he ended with.

The two ended up back on the porch in a repeat of their previous night. Hannibal stood on the lip of the doorway again. Will mirrored his stance a few feet away, his jacket folded over his arm, cold, but he was sure if he made to put it on Lecter would offer to aid him. Will wasn’t up for more cordial touching at the moment.

“Let me drive you.”

“You're not my chauffeur.” Will glanced over his shoulder at the busy street. He was in the city, it would be easy enough to find a cab here. Katz might be free by now. It would be worth trying to call her.

“You must be tired, Jack woke you early. I advise against falling asleep in cabs.”

Will scoffed, “I’m not going to be kidnapped.”

Despite Will’s protests, he still ended up back in Lecter’s Bentley Arnage, cross-armed in the passenger seat.

A few minutes into the silent drive Lecter reached over to turn on the radio. Will rolled his eyes when the first soothing chords of something Chopinesque seeped out of the speakers.

Despite himself, Will feels his eyelids growing heavy.

The car ride is smooth and the whole interior of the car smells of that aftershave. Inhaling the rich scent Will let the soothing music roll over him and soon enough he fell into a comforting dreamless sleep.

A light touch to his shoulder and Will woke instantly. Lecter didn't remove his hand as he looked Will over. Releasing his shoulder, Lecter moved to fix Will's glasses, jostled and half falling off the bridge of his nose.

"There," Lecter mused as he righted Will's image, "Did you sleep well?"

Will nodded vaguely, watching the doctor's strong hands retreating. The veins lining the back of his hand; his broad, always warm palms, seemed to Will almost pleasant. He didn't mind the fleeting touches as much as he should. Will thought back to the lab, their first meeting. He thought of the number of times Lecter had touched him casually and Will hadn't protested. It was an odd effect of his charming and intellectual persona, Will concluded.

"Will?" Shit, Hannibal had said something.

"Sorry?" Will tucked a strand of his hair behind his ear as he dropped his gaze again.

"I asked if this wasn't your dorm."

Will shifted in his seat, folding and unfolding his jacket, "there's only one dorm."

"You didn't get out, I wanted to be sure,"

Will mumbled an apology and, with haste, extricated himself from the car. To his immediate and all-consuming dread, Beverly was visible in the distance sitting on the lawn with a few of her other friends. The circle of seated agents remained totally engrossed in their conversation, but Katz had spotted him and was fast approaching.

Without so much as a wave goodbye, Will began putting as much distance between himself and Hannibal's opulent brand of vehicle as possible.

"Don't tell me that's-"

"Shut up Bev."

"No fucking way that-"

"Bev." Will made every effort to silence her, terrified Hannibal might be able to hear or see any of what passed between himself and Beverly.

Hannibal follows Will to class in a way. He can't seem to get the man out of his head and it's strange and upsetting.

Will toys with the end of his pens, watching in horror as the slides of victims and killers alike take on the man's face every time Will blinks. If he lets himself zone out, he soon finds his thoughts circle back to his conversations with the enigmatic man.

The lights in the room buzz on and the sterile rooms of the Academy are in total opposition to the lush and warm tones of Lecter's home and candlelit dining room. Still, Will finds himself catching Leda and the Swan and curving statues out of the corner of his eye every time he enters a new room. It's infuriating and fascinating the way Lecter has taken up such permanent residence in his head in so little time.

The scent lingers too. Will had showered twice the night before, and yet it still invaded his dreams. Notes of leather and carefully spiced and smoked dishes scored his otherwise perfectly unpleasant nightmare.

"Will?" Phyllis called, snapping Will's attention back to the very non-Hannibal-adjacent classroom.

"Could you repeat that?" Will asked, readying himself to bullshit an answer to whatever question he had just missed.

"I asked if you were alright,"

Good, at least he had practice fielding this one, odd question to asking during class but--

Will looked up, to his shock the room was empty accepting himself and Phyllis. She leaned against her desk and looked out at him, arms crossed.

"Fine, thanks." He mumbled, grasping at pens and his notebook with stiff fingers.

Phyllis stood and came to stand before Will's desk, "Do you have a minute?"

"Does it matter?" Will sat back down in a huff, the worn metal legs of the chair groaning under him. Will folded his arms in a mirror of her defensive gesture and glanced up over the rim of his glasses.

"I wanted to apologize on behalf of Jack. He shouldn't have done that."

"If Jack wants to apologize he can do it himself."

Phyllis sighed and took the seat across the aisle from Will, adjusting her grey suit jacket as she did.

"He's trying to be good, you know."

"We're all trying to be good. Doesn't make him special."

The silence hung heavy and in the stale air of this classroom. No screams or secret pains floated on dustmotes here, Will had no possible mental escape from reality. He was stuck sitting before Jack's honest, well-meaning wife.

“I can tell him that.” She uncrossed her arms and let her hands fall to her lap, “Or I could go home tonight and tell him that all’s forgiven. We’ll have a nice dinner. Next time he calls you'll both be working from a place of restored normalcy. Or, I can tell him he’s unspecial.”

“Jack can hold a grudge,” Will mused, unsure as to if he had actually spoken the words.

“You're telling me,” A smile snuck onto Phyllis' face.

“Fine, tell him he is.. forgiven.” Will sighed the last word, begging her to understand how much he did not enjoy this whole conversation.

Phyllis stood and as she passed she patted Will on the shoulder, he shied away from the contact.

“You're a good kid, Will.” She called back to him as she walked down the aisle back to her desk.

“No coffee offer today?” Will spoke, already halfway to the door.

“I assumed you’d say no.”

“I still like it when you ask,” and with that, Will left behind the quiet of the classroom and took his place among the throng of students filing through the hallways; bumping shoulders, mumbling pardons, eyes downcast.

Chapter End Notes

Again, this chapter is a bit shorter than I would have liked, but I've got a stomach bug and thus, my writing suffered just a bit. Don't worry, I'm on the mend! I'll be back next Wednesday with more!

Comments as always are appreciated!

Chapter 7

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The night was vast and horribly expansive outside Will's small window. A bright swath of light traveled along the ceiling as a car passed by below. Will tracked it with his eye, much too exhausted to turn his head. He closed his eyes again, first met with blackness and the spectral impression of bodies upon bodies and bloody seas.

He snapped open his eyes again and had to blink a few times before the shades were put at bay.

He rolled over in bed, counted the hairline cracks along the white walls, searched for them on the ceiling through the dark. Nothing came of it, he remained resolutely awake.

Fisted hands against his eyes, pressing just hard enough to blur the red darkness behind closed lids, Will forced away image after image of severed limbs and lolling tongues.

The endless barrage of violence gave way to hazy recollections of his argument with Jack, equally unpleasant, and logically following, his thoughts drifted to Hannibal. The smell of the kitchen, the divine meal, his eyes, his hands, his touching Will as it were nothing.

Will opened his eyes again. Odd. This was different.

Hannibal and him hovering over the body, and the smell of antiseptic and the fairly metallic smell of blood. The soft give of the skin under the point of the blade...

Will muffled his face in his pillow and tried to sink into oblivion.

He opened his eyes again to the blinding florencents of the hallway. He stood in boxers and a flimsy white t-shirt, skin prickling with the chill of the concrete hallway. Crossing his arms over his chest, he held himself together.

His feet felt stuck to the tiled floor and the buzzing of the lights overhead grew deafening until the ringing felt like it came from within him.

Something inside him shorted out; that had to be the real source of the sound. Like static, like the hums of a thousand murderous flies.

Sweat pooled on his brow and his shirt stuck to his back, and it wasn't until he reached up to pull it away from his slick skin did he notice his hands trembled.

Breath coming in short, quick burst Will shuffled back to his dorm room.

He leaned back against the honey colored wood of the door and watched on in horror as his vision grew spotty and fizzled away at the edges. The air in the hall hardly seemed like

enough to fill his lungs. His heart kicked against his ribcage hard enough he thought the bone might crack.

Eyes shut, Will grasped at his chest ready to shove his heart back in place should it escape him now. Free hand over his mouth, Will tried to muffle the sounds of his breath, throughout all of this aware that his classmates slept only a few flimy walls away.

The feeling never fully subsided, but after what seemed like hours Will's hands had steady themselves enough that he could wrench open the door.

He rid himself of the sweat-soaked shirt and riffled through the pile of fabric on the floor in search of a towel. He threw them down on the bed and yanked the rest of his sheets to the foot of the bed.

Muscles still jerking in little spasms, synapse still smoldering under skin, Will dragged his desk chair across the room to shove it in front of the door. He hoped it would prevent a repeat of the night's events.

Back in bed, towel under him and a second functioning as a blanket, Will stared into the darkness. The threadbare surface of his makeshift bedding scratched at his shoulders every time he turned over.

Safely alone, Will quieted himself and drifted back into a fitful sleep.

Will adjusted himself in the seat, the plush backing still managing to cause an inordinate amount of discomfort. He peered up at Alana who sat comfortably in her own seat, the desk between them. The dying light outside was still enough to cast the room in a warm haze.

"I don't need to be here, you know." Will mumbled, chin tucked and eyes downcast.

"Well, Jack thinks you do."

Will crossed his arms, aware with his every minute movement that his pose mirrored the textbook definition of defensive, "Because we had an argument?"

"Because he said you seemed-"

"Upset?" Will interjected.

"Unmoored," Alana corrected.

They both knew this had nothing to do with the field argument. Someone must have seen or heard him the night before and, somehow, Jack or Phylis had gotten word of it.

Will scoffed, leaning back in his seat, looking at her over the rim of his glasses, "so what, every time we disagree he's going to demand I see someone?"

Alana looked at him over. Will could see the quick calculations she made about his state of mind. It almost amused him, would she push the topic or not?

“He’s trying to be careful.” She offered.

“I don’t need him to be careful with me.” Will asserted, well aware that everything about his current positioning and the timeline of events leading to this very moment said otherwise.

“I’m not a child,” he tacked on hastily, only to instantly regret it. What a childish thing to say. He shoved his glasses roughly back into place.

Alana sighed, so quietly her breath hardly displaced any air in the room, but nonetheless, Will caught it and frowned, “What?” he demanded.

“Caution is advisable in some situations-” she tried, hands landing atop the sleek surface of her desk.

“And I’m one of them? A volatile situation?”

“That’s not what I meant.”

“Isn't it?”

The two grew silent and Will glared pointedly down. He had assumed his previous little chat with his professor would wipe the slate clean, but apparently as Jack drove away in a huff he had put in a request for an extra meeting with Alana. Will sighed, scrubbing roughly at his face. Apology wasted then. He should have given Phylis a harder time, that would have felt good. Alana cleared her throat pulling Will back to the awkward reality of her office.

“Do we have to do this?” Will muttered.

“I am somewhat obligated to talk to you, yes.”

Will flicked his gaze up, “It doesn’t have to be about Jack though, does it?”

A bemused look, eyebrows drawn together, the afterimage of a grin, flitted across her face, “Are we going to talk about what happened last night?”

Will shook his head as he spoke, “Hannibal.”

It was Alana’s turn to stand. She crossed in front of her desk and sat down, still perfectly composed despite her less than professional choice of seating. Normally, it was Will who drifted aimlessly about the small office as if the 4 walls tugged at him with invisible wire.

He couldn’t be bothered to sit himself up as she looked him over, no doubt taking stock of how closed off he had been this whole meeting. Will glanced at the clock hung above her head, the numbers were much too small to read. 5:20 something?

“You saw him again?” She questioned lightly.

Will shrugged, gaze firmly glued to his shoe laces, one coming undone, “sure.”

“What was that like?”

“Fine, I guess.”

“Will, I ask you things for your benefit, it doesn’t work if-”

“If I obfuscate,”

Alana nodded at this, her chestnut waves kissing her shoulders--clad in a dusty rose jacket--as she did.

“So?” She prommted, plucking a pencil from the surface of her desk, twiddling it between her fingers, nails coated in a brilliant blush nail polish. Will lingered on her hands, slimmers than Lecters, much less… capable. He frowned at his own thoughts, since when did he quantify things in terms of Hannibal Lecter?

“He was… cordial. He has a sense of humor even if he doesn't always look it. He told me that I make good company.”

“How did that make you feel?” she asked, pencil still oscillating between two thin fingers.

“You'll have to be more innovative than that.” Will gave a wry grin and glanced back down.

“Will,” Alana chided, reaching behind herself to grab at the notepad she had abandoned in her change of seating.

“Right, um, I thought of you actually. He said company and my first thought was that I uh would have to tell you.”

Alana shook her head and a smile fought its way onto her face, “Did that thought help or hinder you?” she questioned.

Will shrugged, glancing out the window, the soft orange hue of late evening just starting to seep into the office, “Neither, I just- it was a thought.”

“This is a good thing Will, if you're going to remember anything remember that I don’t want you to deny yourself connections.”

“Connections,” Will echoed, “You make it sound bigger than it is. We are… two not-strangers who share occasional meals.”

She laughed a real laugh at this, her face lighting up and Will took careful stock of the rare sight.

“That’s something. Not-strangers, that’s good, Will.”

Will explained as cut and dry as he could their little breakfast. A little smile continually quirked her lips as he spoke, it was enough to embarrass the young man. The meal hadn’t

seemed like anything at the time, but the sorts of reactions his tales of trysts with Lecter elicited had him feeling oddly flushed.

“He asked about my eating habits ... Drove me back to the academy,” Will voice faded out into a muttered babble of ‘so’s and ‘yeah’s.

“Sounds like someone cares about you.” and while Alana kept her eye dutifully down cast at her notepad that half-amused tone cropped up in her voice once again.

“I want to talk about last night.” The words jumped from Will's lips.

Alana raised an eyebrow, “Okay, describe to me what happened.”

“Jack already told you.”

“I want to hear from you, Will.”

Chapter End Notes

Hello! Apologies for the late upload but school was so very much this week. Again, thank you all so much for reading!!

Authors Note

Chapter Summary

Just an authors note!!!

Hello lovely readers, sadly, schoolwork has gotten in the way of my writing, and so I won't have a chapter for you beautiful people this week. Things should be back on schedule next week!

End Notes

Hello, lovely readers! If you made it this far, wow, thank you! I hate to ask, but as a writer, nothing motivates me or makes my work seem more worthwhile than a comment! No matter how short, comments remind me that real people read what I write in a way hit counts don't!

If this picks up traction (or if anyone asks), I do have plans to make a mini-series out of this!

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!